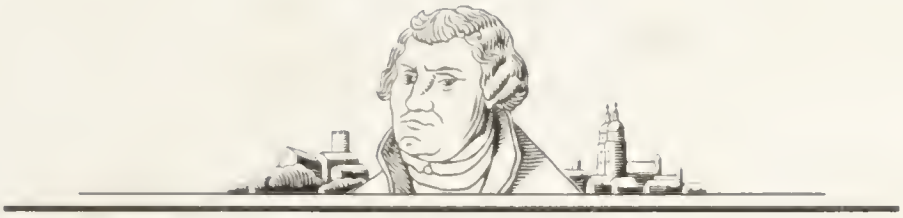

Martin Luther

An introduction to his life and work

German Bible Society

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MARTIN LUTHER: HIS LIFE AND FAITH

EARLY YEARS
1483 – 1505

I am a peasant's son; my great-grandfather, grandfather and father were real peasants. I should really have been a manager, a mayor, or whatever else they have in the village, some kind of a foreman labourer over the others. Then my father moved to Mansfeld and became a miner there. I am from there. But that I should become a Bachelor and Master of Arts, then take off the brown biretta and leave it for someone else to wear, become a monk, to my shame and my father's bitter annoyance – and nevertheless make myself a nuisance to the pope, and me to me, marry an escaped nun – who could have read that in the stars? Who would have guessed that?

In these simple words, from a passage in his Table Talk, Luther describes the whole drama of his career. He was born in Eisleben on 10 November 1483, and, according to the custom of the time, was baptized the following day in the local church of St Peter and Paul with the name Martin, after the saint of the day. His father, Hans Luder, came from a peasant family in the village of Möhra, south of Eisenach. In 1484 he moved with his family to Mansfeld, where he found work and a living in the developing copper mining industry. Here Martin attended the town's grammar school, until, when he was just fourteen, he transferred for a year to the well-known Cathedral School in

Luther's birthplace in Eisleben.

The Church of St Peter and Paul in Eisleben, where Luther was baptized.

Magdeburg. Then he went to the St George parish school in Eisenach, where many of his relatives lived. Like many pupils of the time, he earned part of his living by singing in choirs which went from house to house, giving pious almsgivers an opportunity to please God by their contributions.

In spring 1501, at the age of eighteen, he began basic studies at Erfurt University. Eighteen months later he took the Baccalaureate of Philosophy examination, following which he was responsible for some of those beginning their studies. In January 1505 he gained the degree of Master of Arts. His father, who was very proud of his gifted son wished him to study law, which should have prepared the way for a peasant's son to have a successful professional career. Things were to turn out differently, however.

IN THE MONASTERY
1505 – 1517

On 2 July 1505, Luther was near the village of Stotternheim, on the way back from Mansfeld, when he was surprised by a thunderstorm. A flash of lightning struck so close to him that he called out in terror: *Help, Saint Anne; I will become a monk!* Two weeks later

The Luther House in Eisenach. It belonged to the Cotta family, with whom Luther lodged during his schooldays.

Luther's parents Hans and Margaret (paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder).

he kept his vow. Against his father's expressed will and despite everything his friends could say, he entered the Black Monastery of the Eremitical Order of St Augustine, in Erfurt; it had the reputation of being the strictest of all the monastic orders represented there.

This step appears to have been completely spontaneous, yet it must have been prepared by a long inner process. Luther grew up in the typical piety of the late middle ages, in which God was seen mainly as judging and punishing. He probably soon realized that the study of law which he had begun was not the right course for him. There were also other crises in his life at that time. Shortly before, a student friend had suddenly died, and Luther's own life had been threatened by a serious injury. All of this must have made him ask deep questions about the meaning of his life, questions to which he sought an answer by entering the monastery. The church at that time believed that the monastic life was the only way of attaining the perfect life which God required, and thus earning God's grace.

After a year's probation, Luther took his final vows. Within the fellowship of the order, he attracted attention by his punctilious observance of its rules. It went without saying for him that he should pray earnestly, fast strictly, search his conscience deeply, and make complete confession of his sins. He later assessed his life at this time as follows: *If the monastic life could ever*

get a monk to heaven, I should have entered too. Soon after his reception into the order, the gifted and academically trained young brother was marked out for the priesthood. On 3 April 1507 he was ordained priest in Erfurt Cathedral, and celebrated his first mass on 2 May. Soon after, his order decided that he should study theology, something which at that time was not a precondition for the priesthood.

At the centre of his theological study stood the Bible and church doctrine. Luther showed the same zeal in this as in his monastic life, although, as Master, he had to lecture as well as pursuing his own studies. At this time he was noticed by John von Staupitz, Vicar General of the Eremitical Augustinians, who was also professor of biblical studies at Wittenberg. An intensive pastoral relationship grew up between him and Luther. The young Luther was still deeply conscious of his sins and his worthlessness before God, but Staupitz gave him the decisive advice: *We must look to the man called Christ.* That is why Luther later called Staupitz his *father in the teaching of the gospel,* who had *given birth to him in Christ.*

Cloister of the Erfurt Augustinian monastery, which Luther entered in 1505.

On Staupitz's initiative, Luther was called to the Augustinian Convent at Wittenberg, where he became Professor of Moral Philosophy. On 9 March 1509 he took the degree of Baccalaureus biblicus, and was henceforth responsible also for teaching biblical subjects in the theological faculty. In spring of the same year he was recalled to Erfurt, to support the director of studies there. A year later he was sent to Rome as a delegate to a convocation of the order. There, as he wrote later, he ran as *a pious maniac through all the churches and catacombs,* believing all the lies that were being told there. It was however only later that he realized the full significance of his experiences in Rome.

On his return, Luther, again on Staupitz's initiative, was once more called to Wittenberg. There,

in October 1512, he took the degree of Doctor of Theology, and was appointed to Staupitz's own chair as Professor of Biblical Studies. At the same time he was given additional responsibility within his order: in 1511 he became Convent Preacher, 1512 Sub-Prior, and three years later District Vicar of the ten, later eleven, Augustinian establishments in Electoral Saxony. In addition, he was called in 1514 to preach in the city church.

Martin Luther as a monk (copper engraving by Lucas Cranach the Elder).

But the decisive factor in Luther's theological development was his exposition of the books of Holy Scripture on which he had to lecture regularly from the summer of 1513. Particularly important was his exposition of the Psalms and the letters of Paul, especially Romans and Galatians.

Erfurt Cathedral (left), where Luther was ordained priest.

THE REFORMATION TURNING-POINT AND THE INDULGENCES CONTROVERSY 1517/18

It is probably impossible to give a precise date at which Luther discovered what was to become the content of Reformation theology; it was more a process of steadily deepening insight, rather than a once-for-all act. What is clear, however, is that this process was complete by the spring of 1518. In retrospect Luther wrote that it was while preparing his first lecture on the Psalms, which he was to give in August 1513, that he was deeply shaken as he read in Psalm 31.1, *Deliver me in thy righteousness, since all I knew was that 'God's righteousness' meant his strict judgment. So how should he even save me through his strict judgment? In that way I would be lost for ever!*

Luther speaking with John von Staupitz, Vicar General of the Augustinian Hermits (18th century copper engraving).

Luther's struggle with the central concept of God's righteousness was a struggle to understand the decisive verse from the beginning of Romans (1.17). As Luther himself wrote: *I most ardently desired to know what St Paul wanted. At last I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed (in the gospel), as it is written: he who through faith is righteous shall live". There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt that I was altogether born again.*

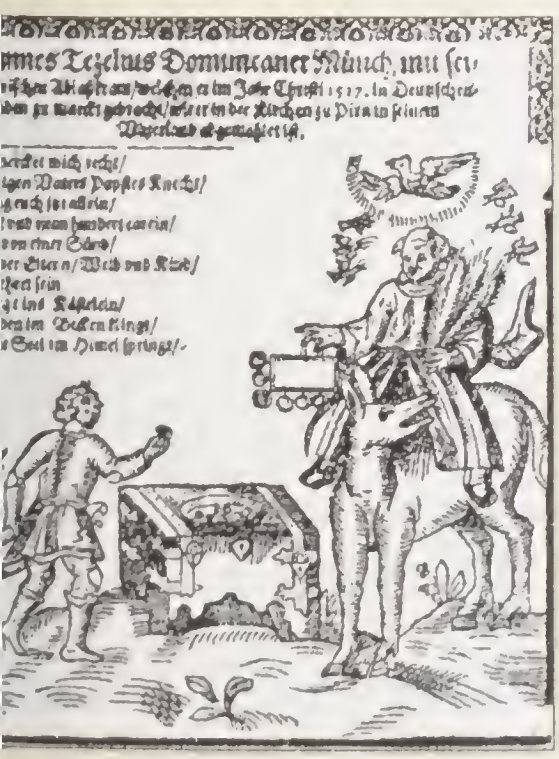
Human beings must not try by their own strength to live in such a way that they can stand before God, that is, by doing many 'good works'. That is simply impossible – as Luther in all his desperate efforts had painfully experienced. On the contrary, God gives righteousness to human beings – through his Son Jesus Christ. The righteous God and the loving Christ are not a contradiction: in Christ

and only in Christ, men and women meet the righteous God. For the righteous God is the one who *makes* people righteous – through faith in Christ.

Luther soon found allies in his university. Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Dean of the theological faculty, joined him, and so did Nicholas von Amsdorf, the professor of theology. In August 1518 Philip Melanchthon came to Wittenberg as professor of Greek, and he too became attracted to Luther's teaching. In this way the small provincial university of Wittenberg soon became a famous seat of learning, whose influence extended far and wide in Europe.

It was inevitable that Luther's new theological insight should bring him into conflict with an abuse which had been introduced into the medieval church in connection with the sacrament of penance. This was the trade in indulgences, whereby the church offered believers the opportunity to pay a sum of money in order to compensate for penance not performed, and for punishment for sins to be endured in purgatory. Luther intervened for a specific reason. In the course of 1517 he heard about the indulgence trade which was flourishing outside the frontiers of Saxony. More and more people from the Wittenberg district of Electoral Saxony were travelling to the neighbouring territory of Archbishop Albert of Brandenburg, to obtain a certificate of indulgence. The Dominican Father John Tetzel was in charge of the indulgence trade.

A contemporary caricature showing Tetzel on his donkey selling indulgences.



The Archbishop was personally concerned that the campaign should succeed, because he, who had been Archbishop of Magdeburg since 1513, had against current church law also obtained the bishopric of Halberstadt and Mainz. He had been allowed to do this in return for paying an appropriately large amount of money to the curia. In order to raise the money, Albert had become deeply indebted to the Fuggers' bank in Augsburg. He was therefore particularly happy to receive from Pope Leo X permission to carry on the indulgence trade in his territory for eight years, half the proceeds going to the pope towards building St Peter's Church in Rome. This indulgence was all the more attractive since the pope had for this

The trade in indulgences. Woodcut by Hans Holbein the Younger.

purpose issued a 'plenary indulence' which cancelled all punishment for sins.

It was especially on theological grounds that Luther was infuriated by the indulgence trade. His anger can still be felt years later, when he wrote about the earlier events: *I heard what dreadful and abominable articles Tetzel was preaching, and some of them I shall mention now, namely: that he had such grace and power from the pope that even if someone seduced the holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and made her conceive, he could forgive him, provided he placed the necessary sum in the box. Again, that the red indulgence-cross, bearing the papal arms, was when erected in church as powerful as the cross of Christ... Again, that if anyone put money in the box for a soul in purgatory, the soul would fly to heaven as soon as the coin clinked on the bottom. Again, that the grace from indulgences was the same grace as that by which a human being is reconciled to God.*

In the light of Luther's insight that the blood of Christ alone frees people from all guilt, this was unbelievable contempt for the divine gift of grace. So when Luther got hold of an instruction manual for indulgence preachers, carrying the arms of the Archbishop of Magdeburg, nothing could hold him back.

Luther had already spoken out in various sermons against the practice of indulgences, but now he felt obliged to address the Archbishop directly in writing. *O great God!* he wrote. *The souls committed to your care are directed to death.* Luther therefore asked the Archbishop *completely to discard that little book, and give the preachers of indulgences something better to preach.* Since however he senses that this letter would have little effect on the Archbishop, he decided to lay his views at

same time before the learned blic.

He summarized his critique in 95 theses. He sent one copy them, together with his letter, Archbishop Albert. At the same ie, on 31 October 1517, the urday before All Saints' Day, he led the placard carrying the the- to the door of the Castle Church Wittenberg, adding an invitation a public disputation on the ques- n. The first thesis already sets the e: *When our Lord and Master us Christ said, 'Repent', he wil- l the entire life of believers to be e of repentance.* The church can pose no punishment on sinners ich can be imposed only after ath, in purgatory (theses 8–13). e penitent sinner receives forgive- ss even without an indulgence eses 36–40). The gos- , that is, the message t Christ has freed us m sins, is the *true trea- re* of the church, on ich its power to for- e sins rests (theses -68). Current indul- ice preaching contra- ts the gospel (theses -80).

No one responded to Luther's invitation to disputation. But in a rt time his theses were y widely distributed, l some lay people res- nded with enthusiastic eement. Luther saw in ; a reason to write a ument in which he put forward his views of the indulgence, summarized in twenty theses. This document was the **Sermon on Indulgences and Grace,** published in March 1518. This was the beginning of Luther's successful journalistic activity, unequalled at that time.

In April 1518 Luther had an opportunity to present and explain his theology in a disputation at the

The door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, on which Luther nailed his 95 theses. The original wooden door was destroyed by fire in 1760. It was replaced in 1858 by a bronze door on which Luther's 95 theses are inscribed.

General Chapter of the German Augustinians in Heidelberg. Here he soon gathered a group of followers who would later advance the Reformation in various parts of Germany: the Swabian John Brenz from Weil der Stadt; Erhard Schnepf from Heilbronn; Theobald Billikan from the Palatinate; and Martin Bucer from Alsace.

PROCEEDINGS AGAINST LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION PROGRAMME 1518 – 1521

From Archbishop Albert of Brandenburg, Luther received no answer to his letter. Probably in order not to harm relations with the Augustinian Order, he passed the matter on to the Curia. In contrast, the Dominicans, on Tetzel's insistence, decided to accuse Luther to the pope on suspicion of heresy. The papal court theologian, the Dominican Sylvester Mazzolini-Prierias, prepared a report against Luther, which concentrated the controversy about the indulgence question in a basic criticism of the pope: 'Against the presumptuous assertions of Martin Luther on the authority of the pope'.

On 7 August 1518 this report was delivered to Luther, together with an invitation ordering him to Rome within sixty days. When he received this invitation, Luther was terrified. He saw himself sharing the fate of the Czech reformer John Huss, who had been condemned to death in 1415 by the Council of Constance. Yet he did not let himself be intimidated. He turned to his friend, the humanist George Spalatin, secretary and adviser of Luther's temporal ruler, the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony. In this way Luther's theological concern entered the political power game of the period.

At this time the Elector was holding an Imperial Diet in Augsburg. There, the ageing Emperor Maximilian was trying to persuade the German Electors to commit themselves to his grandson Charles of Spain as his successor, while the pope wanted to prevent this strengthening of Habsburg power. Since Frederick the Wise agreed on this matter with the papal policy, there was general readiness to accede to his wish that Luther should be examined at the Augsburg Diet by the papal envoy, Cardinal Thomas de Vio (Cajetan), and then let him return unharmed to Wittenberg.

In October 1518 Luther stood before the Cardinal, to whom the pope had given a free hand either to acquit the recalcitrant monk or to condemn him. Cajetan offered Luther the opportunity to recant, but Luther was not to be moved.

In April 1518, in the Heidelberg Faculty of Philosophy, Luther explained his theology in a disputation.

Nor was Luther able to make the Cardinal understand his theological insight that the power of the church to forgive sins rested solely on Jesus' death on the cross. For Luther there was no such thing as a 'treasury' of superfluous merits of Christ and the saints, which the church administered as its own property, and out of which it could sell indulgences. Luther therefore appealed to the *pope better informed,* without being able to change anything in the immediate, deadlocked situation. Since the warrant for his arrest was still in force, he left Augsburg secretly in the night of October 21, and returned to Wittenberg.

Although by doing this, he caused Frederick the Wise some embarrassment, the Elector stood by his professor. Since Frederick himself was playing an important role in the matter of a successor for Emperor Maximilian (he was considered one of the possible candidates), for a time nothing was done in Rome about Luther's case. Luther used this period in intensive teaching and preaching activity, also publishing a great number of writings by which his teaching soon spread widely and became very popular.

In 1519 another scholarly disputation on the subject of Luther's theology began in Leipzig the day before the German Electors chose

Charles of Spain as Emperor in Frankfurt. Luther was originally to appear only as a mediator between his Wittenberg colleague Karlstadt and Professor Eck from Ingolstadt, but he soon felt himself directly challenged by the theses presented by Eck. Eck based his case on the long smouldering question of the supremacy of the pope and the authority of the church councils. He cleverly tried to represent Luther as heir to the Hussite heresy. He did indeed make Luther admit that the pope could make mistakes, that councils could also be in error, and that much of John Huss' teaching had been in accordance with the gospel. No compromise between the opposing positions was possible.

Once Charles V had been elected Emperor, and Rome no longer needed to treat Frederick the Wise carefully, the case against Luther began to move again in January 1520. With Eck's cooperation, a papal bull threatening excommunication was drawn up, which also incorporated positions against Luther taken up by the famous universities of Louvain and Cologne. The bull began with the words of Psalm 74.22: *Exsurge Domine...* ("Arise, O God, plead thine own cause"), and complained that "the boar out of the wood doth

The house in Maximilian Street, Augsburg, in which Luther was examined by Cardinal Cajetan. The house was the residence of Jakob Fugger, a member of the influential Augsburg family of merchants and bankers.

Luther's examination before Cardinal Cajetan (woodcut, Strasbourg 1557).

waste" the Lord's vineyard (Ps 80.13). Forty-one arbitrarily chosen sentences from Luther's writings were condemned as heretical. Luther was given sixty days to recant them, otherwise the ban of excommunication would come into effect. Eck was given the task of publishing the bull in Germany and putting it into effect. He found considerable resistance to this, since Luther had meanwhile won much sympathy.

In October Eck sent a copy of the bull to Wittenberg University. Luther reacted to it with his polemical writing **Against the Execrable Bull of the Antichrist.** On November 17 he appealed publicly to a council, although such an appeal, bypassing the pope, was considered as heresy. On December 10 Luther went one step further. Accompanied by colleagues and students, in front of the Magpie Gate at Wittenberg, he burned books of medieval church law and a copy of the bull threatening excommunication. Immediately afterwards, he defended this step in his pamphlet **Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples were Burned,** insisting on the need to defend the honour of God. Spiritual (ecclesiastical) law had become a means of robbing God of his Lordship and putting the pope in his place. It is no longer God who sits in his temple, but his adversary. After this provocation, Rome hesitated no longer. On 3 January 1521 the pope signed the bull excommunicating Luther.

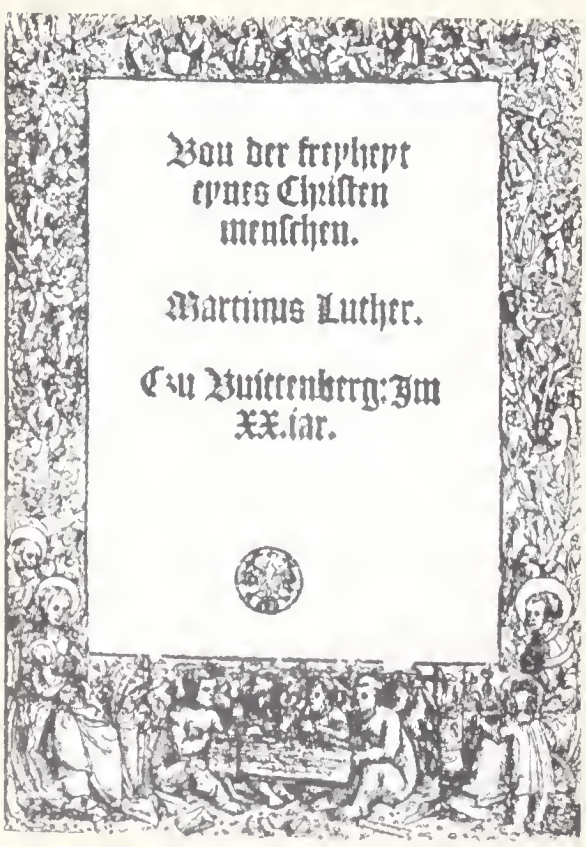
In the same year, in which the case against Luther reached its decisive turning-point, he was very active in writing, in order to make his concern known to a wider

public. Of the many works from this period, four stand out in particular; they may be called programmatic writings of the Reformation. They are the 'Sermon on Good Works', 'To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation', 'The Babylonian Captivity of the Church', and 'The Freedom of a Christian'.

In the Sermon on Good Works, an exposition of the Ten Commandments, Luther underlines that *the first and highest good work, the noblest work of all, is faith in Christ.* All human deeds are to be done in this faith, and can only be called good if this is the case. Hence *the great pomp of papal dispensations, seals, standards and indulgences is to be rejected, because it misleads the poor people into church-building, spending money, and making foundations and prayers, but saying not a word about faith, indeed even suppressing it.* Faith is the only service of God* worthy of the name. Faith gives value to any other work, even the smallest activities of every day, if they are done *in faith and from faith.*

Title page of the bull of 3 January 1521, placing Luther under the imperial ban.

Title page of Luther's book 'On the Freedom of a Christian'.



In his writing To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate – as the full title puts it – Luther turns to the condition of the laity. He wants them to stand by the church in a situation

*German: *Gottesdienst*, the usual word for a worship service.

n which the clergy have failed. Against the claim that the spiritual power is higher than the secular, Luther develops his teaching on the priesthood of all the baptized: *All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate... By baptism we are all ordained priests... For whoever has been baptized may boast that he has already been ordained as priest, bishop and pope, although it is not proper for everyone to exercise such offices.* This leads to the duty of expounding Scripture, long withheld from the church, and the power to call councils.

In The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther turns against Catholic teaching on the sacraments, and thereby attacks the central pillar of worship and theology: The biblical image of the Babylonian captivity, in which Luther clothes his criticism, also shows how Scripture is intended to work: Christians should free themselves from the slavery to human laws which the Roman church has imposed on them. The only criterion for right understanding of the sacraments is the witness of the Bible. The Bible teaches that the essence of the sacrament is the unity of the word of promise and the outward sign. It follows that Luther first reduces the traditional seven sacraments to

Here stood the Magpie Gate in Wittenberg, where on 10 December 1520 Luther burned the bull threatening excommunication, together with books of medieval church law.

three: baptism, penance, and the Lord's Supper. Ordination, confirmation, marriage and the last rites are not sacraments, only church customs. But even the three sacraments have been practised in such a way as to become a *pitiful imprisonment.* The worst captivity consists in the fact that *there is no opinion more generally held or more firmly believed in the church today than this, that the mass is a good work and a sacrifice. And this abuse has brought an endless host of other abuses in its train, so that the faith of the sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business.* Nothing else is necessary, for a *worthy celebration of the mass*, than the faith that firmly trusts in Christ's promise of forgiveness, and *does not doubt that these immeasurable goods are freely given to him. This faith immediately and of itself leads to the most inward movement of the heart, by which the human spirit is made broad and rich. This happens through the love which is given to us by the Holy Spirit in faith in Christ.*

The fourth great writing of 1520, The Freedom of a Christian, contains what may be called the basic Christian law: *If you look at the number of pages,* Luther writes, *it is only a slim volume; but it contains a complete summary of Christian living.* Its content is summed up in two theses: *A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none;* and *A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.* Luther develops in this writing his teaching of the *joyful exchange:* Christ takes all human sins on himself, and in exchange for them gives the human being his righteousness. Thus Christ becomes the servant, and the human being becomes the Lord. But the human being, freed by Christ from the power of sin, deals with his fellow human beings in the same way as Christ has dealt with him. He lives no longer to himself, but as a servant *in Christ and his neighbour: in Christ through faith, in the neighbour through love.*

Emperor Charles V.

In January 1521, Emperor Charles opened his first Diet in Worms. This was the forum for discussion of all the problems concerning the German nation. Frederick the Wise pressed for Luther's case to be dealt

h here. He managed to obtain for her a summons to the Diet, ether with a safe conduct. Luther not hesitate to accept this sum-ns. On 17 and 18 April he stood ore the Diet. He stated that he s ready to recant his writings ofar as he was convinced from ly Scripture that they were in or. His final declaration has come famous: *Unless I am con-ered by the witness of Scripture clear rational arguments (for I ieve neither the pope nor the uncils alone, since it is clear that y have often erred and contra-ted one another), I remain con-ered by the passages of Scripture ich I have quoted, and my con-ence remains prisoner of God's ord. I can and will not recant, for s neither safe nor salutary to act ainst conscience. God help me, nen.*

On the evening of 25 April Luther eived the Empe-'s decision that he uld now, as pro-tor of the Catholic h, proceed against n. Within twenty-e days he must urn to his place residence, with-preaching on way; the safe con-ct would remain d for that period. her left Worms next morning. derick the Wise l other rulers left Diet at the begin-

ning of May. On 26 May, the Emperor persuaded the rest of the assembly, which in strict legal terms no longer had the power to pass resolutions, to issue a law against Luther, condemning him in imperial law as a heretic. His teaching and its diffusion were forbidden; he himself was outlawed. All territories were to return to the old faith. The future of the Reformation thus hung on the implementation of this 'Edict of Worms'. Shortly after the Diet, the Emperor became embroiled in a war with France which lasted until 1526, and prevented him from seriously following the matter through.

Worms Cathedral, where in 1521 Luther stood before the Emperor and the Diet.

Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, Luther's temporal lord.

Luther's temporal ruler also took care that Luther was protected from a hasty application of the judgment. On the way back from Worms, at Altenstein near Eisenach, he pretended to have Luther arrested, and had him brought to the Wartburg Castle. There Luther lived in retirement for ten months as 'Knight George', his identity kept secret. The most important result of this period was his German translation of the New Testament (see pp. 68–69).

During this enforced period of rest, Luther did not feel well. He was cut off from the events for which he knew himself responsible. He was afflicted by severe inner torments. In his *Table Talk* he said later about this time: *I was in my prison in my Patmos, high up in the castle in the kingdom of the birds, but often plagued by the devil. I withstood him in faith, and answered him with the words: My God is the one who made human beings, and he has put all things under their feet (Psalm 8.6). Try if you have any power over him!*

UNREST IN WITTENBERG AND THE REORDERING OF CHURCH LIFE 1521 – 1525

During Luther's stay in the Wartburg, unrest arose in Wittenberg. Under the leadership of Karlstadt, church members pressed for church reforms in the sense of 'evangelical' faith, that is, faith according to the gospel. Priests married, and the first monks left their monasteries. This led Luther to write in Latin a treatise **On Monastic Vows**, in which he argued against the need to keep a vow made under compulsion. A monk, he wrote, can and may

ave a form of life which hinders s faith, and this is precisely the se when monastic life is considered as one's own merit, thus pushg to one side Christ's work of ace.

ogether with this question went the restructuring of the mass. At e end of September, the Lord's pper was given in the city church both kinds, bread and wine. At e end of October the mass ceased be celebrated in the Convent urch; it was replaced by an evanlical preaching service. Luther mself, in a writing of November 21 entitled On the Misuse of e Mass, had formulated his rejecn of the mass, but had insisted at the same time that for the sake of the weak, no over-hasty measures should be taken. In December 1521, Luther could no longer hold out in the Wartburg. In a short, secret visit to Wittenberg, he heard that his followers had forcibly ejected mass-reading priests from the city church.

The conflict became still more intense. At Christmas 1521 Karlstadt celebrated the Lord's Supper in both kinds in the cathedral too.

The Wartburg, where Frederick the Wise had Luther placed in protective custody.

The Augustinian monks burnt images in the Convent Church, together with the oil intended for the last rites. The mass robes were done away with, the liturgy was read in German, and the daily masses were discontinued. The city council and the university decided to take money set aside for reading the mass, and now available for other purposes, and put it into a common 'chest' or fund for the support of the poor. In this overheated atmosphere, the 'Zwickau Prophets', two followers of Thomas Müntzer, appeared in Wittenberg. They asserted that they had been endowed as God's envoys with prophetic and apostolic power, and preached the establishment of the Kingdom of God by the destruction of all the godless.

Luther was becoming more and more concerned about developments in Wittenberg when he actually received a call for help from the council and the university. On 1 March he left the Wartburg and returned to the city. On 9 March, the Sunday known as "Invocavit", he returned for the first time to the pulpit of the Wittenberg parish church. For a week he preached every day on the main Christian doctrines and on Christian practices. He thereby succeeded in calming the uprising. The Zwickau prophets left, and the Reformation could now continue at a more moderate pace.

At Easter 1523 appeared Luther's writing **Concerning the Order of Public Worship**, and in December of the same year he published in his **Formula Missae** a purified liturgy for the mass, still in Latin. In connection with the restructuring of public worship, Latin hymns had to be replaced by German ones. These, together with preaching and the Scriptures, contributed significantly to spreading the new faith. In 1523 Luther wrote his first hymn, **Nun freut euch, liebe Christen, gmein** ('Now rejoice, dear Christians, together'); a year later appeared the **Little Book of Spiritual Songs**, containing hymns which soon became popular everywhere. It was not until 29 October 1525, in the Wittenberg city church, that Luther himself celebrated his own **German Mass.** The new service appeared in print in 1526, with a detailed introduction.

In connection with these questions, Luther found himself compelled to think about the significance of authority for the ordered community. In 1523, he brought out his treatise **Temporal Authority: To what Extent it should be Obeyed.** This contains a summary of his political ethics. In it, Luther develops the theme that God has *two governments* in the world; that is, he has set up two spheres of rule: *the spiritual, by which the Holy Spirit produces Christians and righteous people under Christ; and the temporal, which restrains the un-Christian and wicked so that they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace.* This double rule is necessary, since *no one is a Christian or pious by nature; rather they are all sinners*

The City Church in Wittenberg, where Luther often preached.

nd wicked. Both rules are indis-
ensable as long as this world exists.
ıt Luther tells the ruler exercising
mporal rule that he must do so in
ur directions: *to God in true trust*
nd prayer from the heart... to his
bjects in love and Christian ser-
vice... to his counsellors and lea-
ders in free reason and unbound (that is, unconstrained) understand ing, and *to evildoers with decisive seriousness and strictness.* Subjects owe obedience to a ruler who obeys these rules. But if *a ruler is in the wrong,* then they need not give this obedience, *for it is no one's duty to do wrong; we must obey God (who desires the right) rather than human beings (Acts 5.29).*

LUTHER AND THE PEASANTS' WAR 1525

Soon Luther's political ethics was put to the test. Since the summer of 1524, the first signs of a peasants' rising in south-west Germany could be observed. In the name of the gospel they wanted to set up a social order which would give them back their old rights, and do away with the exploitation and patronage of secular and religious rulers. In this the peasants deliberately joined the fight for the gospel and against the papal church, calling for divine justice and Christian freedom. Typical of the movement's reforming ideas were the 'Twelve articles of the Swabian peasantry', in which they demanded the congregation's right to elect its minister, an end to serfdom, and a just ordering of rates and profits in fields and woods.

In April 1525 Luther had responded to these articles in his **Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia.** He admitted that the peasants' concerns were justified, but also insisted that rioting should not be the means of satisfying them. That would be to confuse divine and temporal rule, and this could only end in a self-destructive annihilation of temporal rule, and the prevention of Christian preaching. *If this rebellion were to continue and get the upper hand, both kingdoms would be destroyed and there would be neither worldly government nor word of God, which would ultimately result in the permanent destruction of all Germany.* But Luther also observed the bad behaviour of the lords, who mercilessly exploited the peasants.

But while Luther in his *Admonition* was still advising compromise, events had far outstripped him. The peasants were refusing to obey their lords or to pay rates, and attacking and plundering castles and monasteries. The rising was not limited to south Germany, but extended also to Thuringia. One of their spokesmen here was Thomas Müntzer, who preached revolution in Mulhouse. After initial successes, the peasants' movement reached a turning-point when Landgrave Philip of Hesse and his father-in-law Duke George of Saxony began to oppose the peasants. On 15 May they besieged the poorly armed peasant army near Frankenhausen. Six thousand peasants lost their lives, while the rulers' forces suffered only slight losses. Müntzer was taken prisoner and later executed. In south Germany too, the peasant unrest was suppressed with great bloodshed.

At the height of the controversy, Luther himself played a leading role. In a sermon at Nordhausen, he pointed the peasant bands to the crucified Christ; but they refused to

en. Luther, under the impression raw violence, directed his next iting **Against the Robbing and urdering Hordes of Peasants.** exhorted the authorities to ack. They should make their con- sion, admit their own guilt for the tbreak of violence, pray for God's p, and offer terms to the oppos- party; but if all this failed, then ey could and must exercise their ce *to stab, to smite, and to slay.*

oth these writings appeared at the same time at the begin- g of May 1525, much too late have any effect. In any case, the ers often misunderstood Luther's second writing, in particular, as giving them licence for violence. Luther then wrote in July 1525 his **Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants,** in which he made it clear that he had written for Christian authorities who used the sword in battle, but then showed mercy once victory was won.

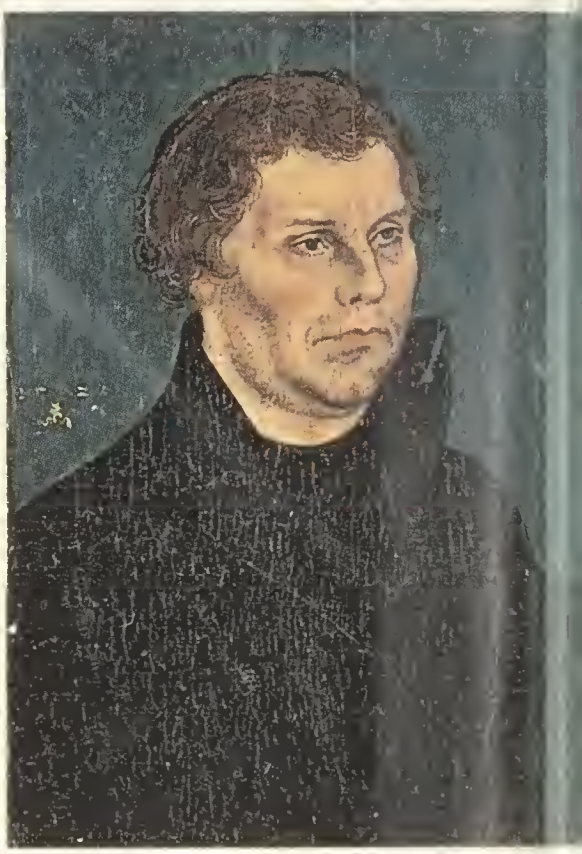
Contemporary woodcut of armed peasants on their way to battle.

LUTHER'S MARRIAGE

the middle of the Peasants' War, Luther married. His treatise n Monastic Vows', written in the artburg (see above, p. 18), contri- ted to a movement in which more and more monks and nuns were leaving their monasteries and convents. Where these remained true to the papal church, their mem- bers fled in large numbers. Many of

those who escaped sought refuge in Wittenberg, where Luther took care of them. He found jobs for the monks, and tried to organise marriages for the nuns.

In April 1523 nine nuns from the Nimbschen convent came to Wittenberg. One of them was Katharine von Bora, the daughter of an impoverished Saxon nobleman, who as a child had been given to the convent, with provision made for her future. As in the case of other escaped nuns, Luther tried to arrange a marriage for her, but without success. She remained *the one left over.* To the complete surprise of his friends, Luther married her on 13 June 1523, in the Wittenberg city church of which John Bugenhagen had been minister since 1523. The public wedding celebration, with a church service and a reception, took place on 27 June. For Luther this marriage was a sign of hope, especially in the troubled days of the Peasants' War, and an act of obedience to his father, who had never agreed to his son's decision to become a monk.



Portraits of Martin Luther and Katharine von Bora, painted in Cranach's studio on the occasion of their marriage.

The Luthers had a happy marriage. Six children were born to them, of whom two died in childhood. The family lived in the former Wittenberg Augustinian monastery, where Luther had lived with its former superior until his marriage. Under Katie's influence, the neglected household turned into a centre of social life. Former monks and nuns, and more or less prosperous followers of the Reformation, met here; Katie also ran a students' hostel. There were parties, music, work, and discussion. Here all Luther's famous Table Talk, containing much valuable information for later generations about the reformer, was spoken and written down.

Among the many tasks which occupied Luther, one was particularly important: the Christian instruction of the young. Those responsible for this were parish ministers, teachers, and fathers of families, who needed suitable materials. As early as the spring of 1525 Luther spoke of the need for a 'catechism'. By this he meant an *instruction* by which people would

taught and introduced to what ey should believe, do, avoid and now in Christianity.

Since 1516 Luther had repeatedly preached in the Wittenberg city church about what became the main parts of the catechism: the Ten Commandments, the creed, the Lord's Prayer, baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sermons became the basis of the two catechisms, known as the **Small Catechism** and the **Large Catechism.** The Large Catechism, originally called the "German Catechism", appeared in April 1529. The Small Catechism then came out in booklet form in May 1529. Its various parts were printed from January as posters to be hung in churches, schools and houses. The significance of both these writings for Protestant teaching even today can scarcely be exaggerated.

THE SPEYER DIETS AND THE MARBURG DISCUSSION ON RELIGION 1526–1529

When the Imperial Diet met in Speyer in the summer of 26, the Emperor was still embroi- d in conflict with France and the pe, and was thus not interested pressing for a final implemen- ion of the Edict of Worms. The estion of the evangelical faith us resulted in a confirmation of e status quo. Until a council was lled, or a national assembly within e next eighteen months, each ler should, in respect of the Edict Worms, "so live, rule and behave as each one hopes and trusts to render account to God and the Imperial Majesty."

At the second Diet of Speyer, held in spring 1529, the position had fundamentally altered. Charles V was thinking about a peace treaty, and his brother Ferdinand had increased the power of the house of Habsburg by adding Bohemia and Hungary to his territory. The majority of the Diet now supported him, and repealed the

Diet's resolution of 1526. Against this decision a protestation was issued by the rulers of Saxony, Hesse, the Margravate of Brandenburg, Braunschweig-Lüneburg and Anhalt, together with fourteen upper German cities. They insisted that in matters of faith, there could be no majority decision, since each was himself responsible before God. The name 'Protestants' goes back to this event.

The position became still more difficult when in the summer Charles made his peace with the pope and with France. The 'Protestant' rulers, led by Landgrave Philip of Hesse, pressed for an alliance of all Protestant rulers and cities from Saxony to Zurich. There was however a decisive theological obstacle to this, namely a basic difference in the understanding of the Lord's Supper which divided followers of the Lutheran and the Swiss Reformation.

The leaders of the Swiss Reformation were Huldrych Zwingli, since 1519 minister in Zurich, who co-operated with the city council there in introducing the Reformation, and the Basel minister John Oecolampadius. Their main difference from the Lutheran Reformation was their

Speyer Cathedral, where at the Diet in 1529 the princes of Saxony, Hesse, the Margravate of Brandenburg, Braunschweig-Lüneburg, Anhalt and fourteen upper German cities made the protestation which gave the name "Protestant" to supporters of the Reformation.

The Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli.

derstanding of the words of insti-
tion of the Lord's Supper, shared
o by many in south-west Ger-
any. More precisely, it was a ques-
n of the understanding of the little
ord *is* in the words of institution:
his is my body; this is my blood".

Zwingli's view was that the doc-
trine of the change of the bread
d wine into the body and blood
Christ (i.e. transubstantiation), a
ctrine basic to the Catholic under-
nding of the mass, was untena-
e. His solution was to understand
e *is* of the words of institution as
eans. Christ is not really present
the bread and wine of the Lord's
pper, but only spiritually present.
ther also rejected the Catholic
ctrine of transubstantiation in its
ude form, but held to the literal
ceptance of the biblical text:
him Jesus *is* really present in
the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

The Swabian Lutherans, under their leader John Brenz, had found great bewilderment in their congregations over the understanding of the Lord's Supper. They therefore issued in 1526 the **Swabian Syngramma.** In a foreword, Luther pointed out that the requirements of reason could not be the right tool for understanding the Word of God, which carries within itself its own reason and its own requirements.

The Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer.

The titles of the two writings which the opposing parties directed against one another in 1527 are themselves significant: Luther's That these Words of Christ 'This is My Body' Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics and Zwingli's That these Words of Jesus Christ 'This is My

Body' will have their Old Meaning Eternally. Luther went on in 1528 to issue his writing On the Lord's Supper called 'Confession', to which Zwingli replied in his writing On Luther's Book on the Lord's Supper called 'Confession'. The chances of unity were clearly slim.

Nevertheless Philip of Hesse pressed for a discussion. He was supported in this by the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer, who had contacts with Zurich and Basel. From 1 to 3 October 1529 the hostile parties held a face-to-face meeting at Philip's castle in Marburg. From Switzerland came Zwingli and Oecolampadius; Bucer also represented their position. From the Lutheran side, in addition to Luther, the theologians Osiander from Nürnberg, Stephan Agricola from Augsburg, John Brenz from Schwäbisch Hall, and Justus Jonas and Melanchthon from Wittenberg came to Marburg.

The debate between them, known to history as the 'Marburg Discussion on Religion', was conducted in a conciliatory tone, but was inflexibly hard in substance. Luther again rejected his opponents' interpretation of the words of institution: *They* (Zwingli and his party) *want to prove conclusively by logical thinking that a body cannot be in two places at the same time...; in the end, they rely on natural reason. But I do not ask in what way Christ is God and man, and how these different natures can be uni-*

The 'Marburg Discussion on Religion', after a 19th century painting by August Noack.

Martin Luther as reformer from Wittenberg (painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder).

ted. For God can do more than all our reasoning. One must yield to the Word of God. The Lord's words are: 'This is my body.' I cannot understand these words in anything but their plain meaning.

The Marburg discussions resulted in fifteen articles. The first fourteen established agreement on the doctrine of the divine Trinity and on infant baptism. Article 15 dealt with the doctrinal difference on the Lord's Supper, but stressed that the sacrament should be given in both kinds, that is, in the form of bread and wine; that the body and blood of Christ were spiritually received in the Lord's Supper; and that the sacrament was necessary as a stimulus to faith. The contradiction between the two Reformation camps was however not overcome.

THE DIET OF AUGSBURG AND THE SMALCALD LEAGUE
1530 – 1531

n February 1530 Charles V had himself crowned by the pope as ly Roman Emperor, and swore to fend the papal church and its hts. Now was the time to solve e problem of Lutheran heresy in rmany. In the summons to the xt Diet, to be held in Augsburg, e emperor outwardly attested his sh "to end division, to confess st error to our Saviour, and reover to hear and consider in e each person's judgment, opinion and view, and to bring them to *one* Christian truth"; but in reality he was determined to proceed with all rigour against the rebels.

Luther, who for nine years had been banned by the pope and condemned by the emperor, could not risk attending the Diet in person. He withdrew to the fortress of Coburg, in the far south of Saxony, and followed events from there. Right at the beginning of the Diet,

Coburg Fortress, where Luther stayed during the Diet of Augsburg.

he stated his position in his **Admonition to the Clergy now Assembled at the Diet of Augsburg,** and listed once more all the abuses which had led to the evangelical Reformation of the church.

The high point of the Diet for the Protestants was the reading of a defence of the evangelical faith prepared by Melanchthon and approved by Luther. It is called the **Augsburg Confession** (Confessio Augustana) after the place where it was first read. It is expressed in an extremely moderate tone, and attempts to prove that the evangelicals are in doctrine entirely on the same basis as the Catholic church. In these tense days, Luther kept in contact by letters with his friends in Augsburg. When, in the face of the emperor's inflexibility and the power of his allies, they were close to despair, Luther pointed them to the wisdom of God at work in history, surpassing all human wisdom.

On 3 August a **Refutation** (Confutatio) of the evangelical confession, commissioned by Charles V, was read to the Diet. In it, he maintained that the concerns of the evangelical side were without foundation. Negociations over a compromise were however continued, but without result. Melanchthon responded to the "Refutation" by a

efence (Apologie) of his Confes-
on, which however Charles rejec-
d. The Protestant rulers left before
e official end of the Diet. The reso-
tion of the Diet called again for
e implementation of the Edict of
Vorms, and gave the Protestant
lers until 15 April of the following
ar to abandon their support for
e heretical faith, and for church
forms.

No one doubted that the em-
peror was ready to proceed
gainst the supporters of the Refor-
ation, if necessary by force. At the
d of the year, the evangelical
lers met in Thuringian Smalcald,
d formed a defence league. In a
Warning to His Dear German
eople of 1531, Luther stated that
sistance to the papists, and to the
mperor if he declared war against
e gospel, was not rebellion but

The Diet of Augsburg met in 1530 in this Hall of Labour.

The Diet listening to the reading of the Confessio Augustana or Augsburg Confession, in which Melanchthon defended the Protestant position.

self-defence. Soon the Smalcald League was strengthened by the entry of the upper German cities.

But, as so often before, so now again the situation in foreign politics came to the evangelicals' help. In April 1532 the Turkish army under Sultan Suleiman II crossed the Hungarian frontier and threatened the west. Faced by this danger, the emperor found himself forced to negociate a compromise. These negociations led in Nürnberg on 23 July 1532 to a settlement, called the 'Nürnberg Armistice', which conceded freedom of religion to the evangelicals in return for their participation in the war against the Turks. This was the first time that they were given official toleration, though this was only until the next council, which was to be called within a year.

In the years following the Nürnberg Armistice, the evangelical movement spread to more and more areas: Anhalt-Dessau, Pomerania, Württemberg, Mecklenburg and some of the Schleswig dukedoms joined the Reformation; in 1539 also the Dukedom of Saxony and Brandenburg.

UNIFICATION IN THE PROTESTANT CAMP: THE WITTENBERG CONCORD AND THE SMALCALD ARTICLES 1536 – 1537

The Smalcald League had made the Augsburg Confession its charter. But relations between Protestants were still troubled by disagreement on the question of the Lord's Supper. Luther himself saw no reason to change his position, but other forces worked rather towards reconciliation. Melanchthon in Wittenberg and Martin Bucer in Strasbourg had been in correspondence since 1531, and Landgrave Philip had not yet given up hope. He finally succeeded in persuading Luther also to make a fresh attempt at unification. At the end of 1534 Melanchthon and Bucer met in Kassel; in May 1536 a delegation of upper German ministers, led by Martin Bucer and his comrade-in-arms Wolfgang Capito, travelled to Wittenberg. Luther was ready to unite with them if they would accept the Augsburg Confession, and with it the content of his teaching on the Lord's Supper. In this sense the 'Wittenberg Concord' was concluded, and signed by both sides on 29 May 1536. No such agreement was reached with the Swiss Reformation.

During these years, members of the Diets repeatedly called for a council which would settle religious controversies, but nothing came of

The 'Dessau Last Supper' by Lucas Cranach the Younger shows the Wittenberg reformers and the Anhalt nobles as disciples gathered around Christ at the Last Supper. In the middle is Christ, offering Judas the morsel; on his left are first George III of Anhalt, then Luther, Bugenhagen and Justus Jonas. On Christ's right sit Melanchthon and other supporters of the Reformation; in the foreground kneels Prince John of Anhalt, who commissioned the picture. Lucas Cranach the Younger appears as a cup bearer.

this. In 1534 a new pope, Paul III, was enthroned. He saw that certain reforms were necessary for the self-preservation of the church, and did not reject the possibility of a council. He sent his representative Peter Paul Vergerius to Germany to take soundings. Vergerius, who later himself went over to the evangelical faith and became counsellor of Duke Christoph in Tübingen, even went to Wittenberg and invited Luther to a discussion in the Elector's castle. Luther stated that he was ready to go to a council, despite the danger it involved for himself. But he was by no means inclined to have his teaching judged there; instead, he wanted to share his theological insights with those who had so far proved unteachable.

Summonses were in fact issued to a council which was to take place in May 1537 in Mantua, with the purpose of restoring peace in the church and rooting out heresy. With great hesitation the evangelical side decided to prepare for the council. Luther's Elector commissioned him to summarise once more the articles of the evangelical faith. In January 1537 Luther accordingly set out the **Smalcald Articles.** The Elector wanted to have them accepted by the coming assembly of the Smalcald League as a common official statement of the Protestants. In contrast with the Augsburg Confession, Luther emphasised here not the points of agreement with the Roman church, but the differences. As the centre of

In the Thuringian town of Smalcald, the Protestant princes united in 1531 to form a defensive alliance.

Landgrave Philip of Hesse (woodcut by Hans Brosamer, c. 1546).

Holy Scripture, and thus also the heart of his theology, Luther developed once more the overriding importance of the doctrine of the justification of the sinner, made available to human beings by Jesus Christ. Built on this foundation, the evangelical church is the true church, and the papal church the unfaithful one. For Luther the Smalcald Articles are, so to speak, his theological testament: *Those who come after me can read here my testimony and confession.*

The Luther House in Smalcald, where in 1537 the 'Smalcald Articles on the Evangelical Faith', considered by Luther as his theological testament, were written.

Luther was invited to the assembly in Smalcald, together with Bugenhagen, Melanchthon and Spalatin. On 7 February, even before the discussions had begun, he gave an impressive sermon on the temptations of Jesus. It was then that he felt the first symptoms of the colic, caused by kidney stones, which would lead to a threatening illness. In the following days his condition steadily worsened, so his friends decided to take Luther away from Smalcald. As he was being carried over uneven paths in the Thuringian Forest, the kidney stone broke up, and Luther's condition improved.

Meanwhile, the rulers in the Smalcald League had signed Luther's articles. Against his advice, however, they refused to take part

in a council which, in their eyes, could only be a show designed to root out the reformed faith. Despite the annoyance that this decision caused in the Catholic camp, the emperor, who was still preoccupied by the conflict with France and the Turks, was obliged to extend once again the armistice with the Protestants. This was done by the Frankfurt Armistice of 19 April 1539.

LUTHER'S LAST YEARS
1538 – 1546

Luther's theological work centres in these years on the understanding of the church. In his book **On the Councils and the Churches,** of spring 1539, he once more develops the thesis that Holy Scripture must be the only valid criterion for a church council. The true church may be recognised first and most clearly by holding *God's holy Word. So where you hear or see that such a Word is preached, believed, confessed and then acted on, may know for certain that in that place there must be a true ecclesia sancta catholica, that is, a holy, Christian people, even though it may be very small in number.* Additional criteria are the right administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the right exercise of the power of the keys (that is, taking binding decisions on behalf of the church, according to Matthew 16.19 and 18.18), the calling of worthy preachers, public prayer, and readiness patiently to bear the cross in temptation and persecution. Luther stresses the same signs of the true church again in his book **Against Hans Worst** published in 1541; this is an answer to an insulting writing against the Protestants by Henry, Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel.

Luther's sharpest words, however, are found in a book published scarcely a year before h

Title page of Luther's book 'Against the Papacy', showing the pope, with devils swarming round him, on blazing flames in the jaws of hell.

Martin Luther at fifty (painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder).

death. It was occasioned by a fresh call to a general Christian council, to meet in Trent on 15 March 1545. Because the Protestant side maintained its refusal to take part, the council did not open until nine months later, and then with only 34 voting members. Luther however published in March 1545 his treatise **Against the Papacy in Rome, founded by the Devil.** In it, he mercilessly pillories the pope as *an anti-Christ and a werewolf... an enemy of God, an enemy of Christ, an enemy of all Christians and all the world.* Anyone who wants to obey the pope must know *that he is obedient to the devil against God.*

In addition to his writing, Luther continued tirelessly active in other ways. From 1512 until three months before his death he taught as professor of theology in Wittenberg, and from 1535 he was dean of the theological faculty. He regularly gave lectures on the books of Holy Scripture. Particularly important are his lectures on Genesis (1535–1545), and on Galatians (1531), which had earlier made an essential contribution to his reforming insights, and of which he could now say: *I love it as much as I love my Katie.* Nor did Luther think it beneath him to take part in his students' disputation exercises. Luther considered his preaching activity as vital as the scholarly instruction of students. Over two thousand of his sermons have been preserved, some of which he himself revised for the press. He wanted God's Word to be heard in the language of reality. This is the origin of the important place still given to preaching in Protestantism.

From 1533, Luther had been repeatedly asked by theologians and printers to allow a complete edition of his works to be published. He hesitated for a long time to give his consent, since he considered his writings more as spontaneous occasional works, written in response to current events, rather than as a corpus of eternal significance. But he finally gave in to pressure and agreed. In 1539 the first volume of German writings appeared, followed in 1545 by a second volume containing Latin writings. Luther used the introduction to the first

The castle of the Counts of Mansfeld, who invited Luther in his last days to settle a family quarrel.

The house in Eisleben where Luther died.

volume as a general introduction
the right way of studying Scriptu
In his view, the first thing necessa
is prayer: *Kneel down in your lit
room and pray to God with r
humility and earnestness, that
through his dear Son may g
you his Holy Spi
who will enlight
you, lead you, a
give you unc
standing.* The
cond is meditati
*that is, not o
in your heart,
also externally,
actually repeat
and compar
oral speech a
literal words of
book reading a
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with diligent at
tion and reflecti
so that you
see what the H*

Spirit means by them. And the third is inner struggle: *This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is.*

In addition to all these activities, Luther was grappling with the problems caused by the building and consolidation of the newly established Protestant churches in the various German states. He was also constantly called on to act as a pastor and counsellor. One such task was the last he undertook.

Luther's former temporal rulers, the Counts of Mansfeld, were involved in a long drawn out legal battle. At the height of their controversy, the estranged brothers agreed to recognise Luther as mediator. Luther was weakened by illness, and depressed by illness and death among his family and friends, yet he made his way in January 1546 to Eisleben. Shortly before reaching the town, he suffered a fainting fit with giddiness and shortness of breath, from which he recovered. On 14 February he preached in the town in which he was born; on 17 February an agreement on the points of dispute was signed between the opposing parties. In the course of another evening spent with his friends, he suffered from suffocation and loss of breath. During the night he awoke, and felt that death was near. His last words were a prayer in the words of

The room in which Luther died.

Psalm 31.5: *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.* His friend Justus Jonas was beside him. and asked him if he wished to die in the Christian confession which he had preached; Luther answered "Yes". On 16 February he noted on a piece of paper words which could sum up his life's work: *No one should think to have tasted enough of Holy Scripture, unless he has directed the churches for a hundred years with prophets like Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ and the apostles. We are beggars: that is the truth.*

Luther's body was carried from Eisleben through Halle to Wittenberg. Bugenhagen preached the

funeral sermon, and Melanchthon added a tribute in Latin. He ranked Luther, as a "tool of God", with the prophets, apostles and outstanding men in the history of the church.

The movement which Luther brought to life has long since grown far beyond Luther himself. Even after his death, the struggle for the truth of the Reformation and the freedom of the evangelical church continued. Already in the year of his death, there broke out the Smalcald War, the military confrontation which had long been threatening. Despite the defeat of the Protestant side, their cause could no longer be suppressed. After a period of indecision, the Diet of Augsburg issued a religious peace settlement on 25 September 1555. This gave legal recognition to the representatives of the Augsburg Confession, b also maintained the security of t old church. Within the various G man territories, the famous pr ciple, "cuius regio, eius relig applied; that is, the confession subjects was to be determined that of their ruler. Other subje were free to emigrate. (For chu territories, there was a prov that if a prince of the church w over to Protestantism, he wo automatically lose his rank in church, and therewith his te torial claim.) By these decisic the Augsburg religious settlem which originally had only reflec at a particular time the balance ween the confessions and t efforts to preserve the ground w had been won, finally sealed gious division in Germany, sowed the seed of future confl

Luther's tomb in Wittenberg.

LUTHER'S PREFACES TO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE PSALMS

Luther not only translated the Bible: he also wrote 'Prefaces' to the Old and New Testaments and to the individual books of the Bible, which were printed in various editions together with the biblical text. In principle there was nothing new in this. Already Jerome, whose Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, became standard in the Roman church, added Prologues to many of the books, and the church filled the gaps from other sources. But in terms of content, Luther's Prefaces are of a quite different quality. Jerome, as a philologist, was first concerned to defend the need for his translation, and give the reader information about Bible history and the biblical writers; Luther was concerned with the message of the Bible and its readers. He felt the Bible to be the primary source of his theology, so he is specially at home in this area. Thus the introductions, which he wrote with great love and care, lead straight into the heart of his theology.

Title page of the 1545/46 New Testament.

In this edition Luther's Preface to the New Testament is printed in full. From the prefaces to individual books the most important sections are reproduced. Note: A 55-volume English translation of most of Luther's works was published by Concordia Publishing House, St Louis and by Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia from 1955. Quotations from Luther in this introduction are based on this translation. The Prefaces to books of the Bible are contained in volume 35. His Prefaces to the Old and New Testaments are also translated in Timothy F. Lull (ed.): Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings, Fortress Press, Mineapolis 1989, pp.12–134.

THE PREFACE TO THE NEW TESTAMENT*

It would be right and proper for this book to go forth without any prefaces or extraneous names attached and simply have its own say under its own name. However, many unfounded interpretations and prefaces have scattered the thought of Christians to a point where no one any longer knows what is gospel or law, New Testament or Old. Necessity demands, therefore, that there should be a notice or preface, by which the ordinary man can be rescued from his former delusions, set on the right track, and taught what he is to look for in this book, so that he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the gospel and promises of God.

Therefore it should be known, in the first place, that the notion must be given up that there are four gospels and only four evangelists. The division of the New Testament books into legal, historical, prophetic, and wisdom books is also to be utterly rejected. Some make this division, thinking thereby (I know not how) to compare the New with the Old Testament. On the contrary it is to be held firmly that just as the Old Testament is a book in which are written God's laws and commandments, together with the history of those who kept and of those who did not keep them, so the New Testament is a book which are written the gospel a the promises of God, together w the history of those who belie and of those who do not belie them. Thus one may be sure t there is only one gospel, just there is only one book – the N Testament – one faith, and c God who gives the promise.

For euangelion (gospel) is Greek word and means Greek a good message, good dings, good news, a good rep which one sings and tells w gladness. For example, w David overcame the great Goli there came among the Jewish p ple the good report and encou ing news that their terrible ene had been struck down and they had been rescued and g joy and peace; and they sang danced and were glad for it.

Thus this gospel of God or Testament is a good story report, sounded forth into al world by the apostles, telling true David who strove with death, and the devil, and overc them, and thereby rescue those who were captive in si flicted with death, and overp red by the devil. Without any of their own he made them eous, gave them life, and them, so that they were peace and brought back to For this they sing, and than

*From the 1522 September Testament; see below, p. 68.

praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and remain steadfast in faith.

This report and encouraging tidings, or evangelical and divine news, is also called a New Testament. For it is a testament when a dying man bequeaths his property, after his death, to his legally defined heirs. And Christ, before his death, commanded and ordained that his gospel be preached after his death in all the world. Thereby he gave to all who believe, as their possession, everything that he had. This included: his life, in which he swallowed up death, his righteousness, by which he blotted out sin; and his salvation, with which he overcame everlasting damnation. A poor man, dead in sin and consigned to hell, can hear nothing more comforting than this precious and tender message about Christ; from the bottom of his heart he must laugh and be glad over it, if he believes it true.

Now to strengthen this faith, God has promised this gospel and testament in many ways, by the prophets in the Old Testament, as St Paul says in Romans 1.1, "I am set apart to preach the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David," etc.

To mention some of these places: God gave the first promise when he said to the serpent, in Genesis 3.15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Christ is this woman's seed, who has bruised the devil's head, that is, sin, death, hell, and all his power. For without this seed, no one can escape sin, death, or hell.

Again, in Genesis 22.18, God promised Abraham, "Through your descendant shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Christ is that descendant of Abraham, says St Paul in Galatians 3.16; he has blessed all the world, through the gospel. For where Christ is not, there is still the curse that fell upon Adam and his children when he had sinned, so that they all are necessarily guilty and subject to sin, death, and hell. Over against this curse, the gospel now blesses all the world by publicly announcing, "Whoever believes in this descendant of Abraham shall be blessed." That is, he shall be rid of sin, death, and hell, and shall remain righteous, alive, and saved forever, as Christ himself says in John 11.26, "Whoever believes in me shall never die."

Again God made this promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.12 14 when he said, "I will raise up your son after you, who shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son," etc. This is the kingdom of Christ, of which the gospel speaks: an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom of life, salvation,

and righteousness, where all those who believe enter in from out of the prison of sin and death.

There are many more such promises of the gospel in the other prophets as well, for example Micah 5.2, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel"; and again, Hosea 13.14, "I shall ransom them from the power of hell and redeem them from death. O death, I will be your plague; O hell, I will be your destruction."

The gospel, then, is nothing but the preaching about Christ, Son of God and of David, true God and man, who by his death and resurrection has overcome for us the sin, death, and hell of all who believe in him. Thus the gospel can be either a brief or a lengthy message; one person can write of it briefly, another at length. He writes of it at length, who writes about many words and works of Christ, as do the four evangelists. He writes of it briefly, however, who does not tell of Christ's works, but indicates briefly how by his death and resurrection he has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in him, as do St Peter and St Paul.

See to it, therefore, that you do not make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws and doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore and as certain prefaces put it, even those of St Jerome. For the gospel does not expressly demand works of our own which we become righteous a are saved; indeed it conden such works. Rather the gos demands faith in Christ; that he overcome for us sin, death, a hell, and thus gives us righte ness, life, and salvation not thro our works, but through his o works, death, and suffering, order that we may avail ourselve his death and victory as though had done it ourselves.

To be sure, Christ in the gos and St Peter and St Paul sides, do give many comma

Adam and Eve (Lucas Cran the Elder). The account of the Fall is central to Christia doctrine, not least because raises the question of the ro of the sexes and their relati to one another. In the early 16th century there were ma debates about the interpret tion of the Fall and the rela tionship of the first man to the first woman. The main question was: "Who was to blame?" Theologians eve disputed whether after the Fall, the woman could be considered human, or as having a soul at all. Luther revised the understanding o the relevant passages in Pau on the basis of which the female sex had been deva lued for centuries; he redefi ned the relationship betwe woman and man in the sen of Christian marriage.

ments and doctrines, and expound the law. But these are to be counted like all Christ's other works and good deeds. To know his works and the things that happened to him is not yet to know the true gospel, for you do not yet thereby know that he has overcome sin, death, and the devil. So, too, it is not yet knowledge of the gospel when you know these doctrines and commandments, but only when the voice comes that says, "Christ is your own, with his life, teaching, works, death, resurrection, and all that he is, has, does, and can do."

Thus we see also that he does not compel us but invites us kindly and says, "Blessed are the poor" etc. (Matthew 5.3). And the apostles use the words, "I exhort", "I entreat", "I beg", so that one sees on every hand that the gospel is not a book of law, but really a preaching of the benefits of Christ, shown to us and given to us for our own possession if we believe. But Moses, in his books, drives, compels, threatens, strikes, and rebukes terribly, for he is a lawgiver and driver.

Hence it comes that to a bel[ie]ver no law is given by which he becomes righteous before G[od] as St Paul says in 1 Timothy 1.9 because he is alive and righteous saved by faith, and he needs n[o] ing further except to prove his by works. Truly, if faith is there cannot hold back; he proves it self, breaks out into good wo confesses and teaches this go before the people, and risks hi for it, to his neighbour's profi order to help him – not only to attainment of this grace, but al body, property, and honour. Se that Christ has done this for he thus follows Christ's exam

That is what Christ meant w at the last he gave no c commandment than love, which people were to know were his disciples and true b vers. For where works and lov not break forth, there faith is right, the gospel does not yet hold, and Christ is not ri known. See, then, that you approach the books of the O Testament as to learn to read t in this way.

THE GOSPELS

The first books of the New Testament are the Gospels. The Greek word 'euangelion' means, as Luther writes in his Preface to the New Testament (see p. 42 above), *a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with gladn* The first Christians used this w initially for the message tha Jesus' death on the cross and re rection, sin and death are quered, and the way to true is opened up (Romans 1.16

Corinthians 15.1-5). It was probbly Mark who, on this basis, first ave the name 'Gospel' to his full ccount of Jesus' life and works (see Mark 1.1). Following this example, he early church then gave the ame 'Gospel' to the accounts of he three other writers. This expresses the fact that, despite all differenes of detail, it is always one 'Good Jews', unfolded in four ways.

On this, Luther writes in the Preface to the New Testament (see p. 42 above): *Thus this gospel of God or New Testament is a good story and report, sounded forth into all the world by the apostles, telling of a true David who strove with sin, death, and the devil, and overcame them, and thereby rescued all those who were captive in sin, afflicted with death, and overpowered by the devil. Without any merit of their own he made them righteous, gave them life, and saved them, so that they were given peace and brought back to God. For this they sing, and thank and praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and remain steadfast in faith.*

It is characteristic that Martin Luther, who wrote prefaces to almost all the books of the Bible to accompany his translation, wrote no prefaces to the Gospels. This reflects the fact that he was more concerned with the gospel than with the Gospels. He finds this more clearly in the letters of the Apostle Paul, especially Romans, and in the first letter of Peter. In contrast, the Gospels contain too *many works and miracles of Christ* for his taste. In his sermons, however, Luther made all the greater use of texts from the Gospels.

Among the Gospels, Luther prized most highly that of John. Luther explains this in a section entitled **Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament**, originally included in the Preface to the New Testament of 1522, but omitted from editions of the Bible since 1534, and from editions of the New Testament from 1539. He writes: *Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about his preaching, while the other evangelists write much about his works and little about his preaching. Therefore John's Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them.*

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles is the first in the canonical order of New Testament books for which Luther wrote a full introduction. He recalls in it that until then, this book had been read *as though St Luke had written about the personal work or history of the apostles*

Lucas Cranach the Elder's diptych 'Law and Grace' (c. 1535) is a picture-sermon showing the central themes of Luther's understanding of the Bible, presenting his reforming theology in visual form.

The left half is entitled 'Law'. The Law, revealed in the Ten Commandments and proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets (lower right), give men and women God's guidelines for living. Yet, as the story of the Fall (upper left) already shows, they try in vain, in their faith and life, to give God his due. Human life is threatened by sin and death (centre). Human beings cannot earn their own salvation; they are closer to death and destruction (lower left) than to the living God (upper centre). This is how Luther represents the relationship of men and women to God in the Old Testament.

The right half is entitled 'Gace'. The New Testament, with the gospel of the cross of Christ, brings into the centre the grace

which God shows to humanity. As Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the desert, so that the people of Israel might be healed (Deuteronomy 21.4-9; upper left), so must Christ be raised up, to redeem humanity from death and sin. Humanity is not made right before God by obeying the Law or by its own deeds: only by faith in God's love and grace. John the Baptist points people (lower left) to Christ as the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world (lower centre). God comes to help the poor, wretched and oppressed, as Luke's Christmas story (upper centre) clearly shows by the Annunciation and the message to the shepherds. By his resurrection Christ has conquered sin and death (lower right). Since Christ has now ascended into heaven (upper right) and sits at God's right hand, God is no longer far from human beings: through faith in Christ they are bound together with God.

simply as an example of good works or good life. This is in Luther's eyes a shortsighted view. One should rather read this book from the point of view that in it, its writer *teaches the whole of Christendom, even to the end of the world, that the true and chief article of Christian doctrine is this: We must all be justified alone by faith in Jesus Christ, without any contribution from the law or help from our works.*

For Luther, the Book of Acts is therefore a kind of exposition of the letters of Paul: *For what Paul teaches and insists upon with words and passages of Scripture, St Luke here points out and p with examples and instance* the whole work is at the same a *mirror in which you can se this is true: Sola fides just "faith alone justifies".*

It is not surprising that, i controversies of his time, L found the Acts of the Apostles cularly important. *By means book, used in this way, w silence in a masterly and eff way the loquacity of oppo who keep on pointing us to t and to our own works, and their foolish unwisdom befc the world.*

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

In it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "the righteous shall live by faith." These famous words of Romans 1.17 contain the kernel of Martin Luther's basic theological insight. This text opened up to him the new understanding of the central concept of the 'righteousness of God'. It is therefore not surprising that, in his Preface to this book, he cannot praise it enough. *This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.*

The whole letter centres o salvation that God has giv human beings in Jesus Christ. this means is explored unde headings 'law' and 'gospel', v also became key concept Luther. Luther's first concern see that law is not to be under here in the usual sense as *a tea about what works are to be d not done.* For such doing o doing is something outwar God wants the heart to be in *God judges according to wha the depths of the heart. For th son, his law too makes its de on the inmost heart; it can satisfied with works, but punishes as hypocrisy and li works not done from the bott

the heart. Hence all are called liars in Romans 3.4, because no one keeps or can keep God's law from the bottom of the heart. For everyone finds in himself displeasure in what is good and pleasure in what is bad. If, now, there is no willing pleasure in the good, then the inmost heart is not set on the law of God. Then, too, there is surely sin, and God's wrath is deserved, even though outwardly there seem to be many good deeds and an honourable life.

It is precisely where the law is correctly followed that this becomes clear. *You live a fine outward life in the works of the law, and you pass judgment on those who do not so live. You know how to teach everyone; you see the speck that is in the eye of another, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye. For even though you keep the law outwardly, with works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, nevertheless you do all this unwillingly, without pleasure in and love for the law, but with reluctance and under compulsion. For if the law were not there, you would prefer to act otherwise. The conclusion is that from the bottom of your heart you hate the law.*

This hostility is overcome by grace: the righteousness which is given, not worked out reluctantly and grudgingly by human beings, the only *righteousness* which *counts before God*, because God himself *"makes, works"* it (which Luther mentions as a possible translation of 1.16). Now everything is the other way round: you *must* not fulfil the law, you *can*. The crucial point of conversion is *faith*, which gives people a new heart.

Luther has to begin by removing a misunderstanding, not only about the law, but also about faith. *Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith*, which has no consequences for human action. It was just this misunderstanding which in Luther's view fostered the error that faith alone was not enough to become *pious and blessed*, but that good works must be added. Faith is not a human delusion but *a divine activity: a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God.* This divine work *makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.*

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would

stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes people glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.

This is in the background when Luther formulates his new understanding of righteousness. *Righteousness, then, is such a faith. It is called the righteousness o God or: the righteousness whic counts before God because Go gives it..., and makes people fulfi their obligations to everybody. Fo through faith a person become free from sin and comes to tak pleasure in God's commandment thereby he gives God the honou due him, and pays him wha he owes him. Likewise he serve his fellows willingly, by whateve means he can, and thus pay his debt to everyone.*

Nature, free will, and our ow powers cannot bring th righteousness into being. For as r one can give himself faith, neith can he take away his own unbeli How, then, will he take away

The Ten Commandments, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, shows how the Law is both kept and broken. The rainbow crossing the whole picture symbolizes God's covenant with humanity, which God keeps despite human transgressions.

e sin, even the very smallest? efore all that is done apart faith, or in unbelief, is false; it is hypocrisy and sin, Romans 14.23, no matter how good a showing it makes.

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

her is strongly reminded of ents in his own time reflected l's first letter to the Christians rinth. In his Preface he states *hose Corinthians may well be xample or illustration of our le in these days, who also cer- need an epistle of this* What is the question? The thians mistakenly believe he Holy Spirit works mainly in extraordinary, partly ecstatic phenomena, such as speaking in tongues. They therefore think everything earthly is meaningless, principles of good behaviour seem superfluous; in short, "everything is allowed" (10.23). *They know and understand nothing* of the *central truth* that Paul preached to them, namely, *freedom from sin.*

Luther gives a striking summary of what Paul must have felt. *He had taught his Corinthians Christian faith and freedom from the law. But then the mad saints came along, and the immature know-it-alls. They broke up the unity of the doctrine and caused division among the believers. One claimed to belong to Paul (depending on who had converted him to Christianity), the other to Apollos; one to Peter, the other to Christ. One wanted circumcision, the other not; one wanted marriage, the other not; one wanted to eat food offered to idols, the other not... They went so far that one man abused his liberty and married his stepmother, some did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and some thought lightly of the sacrament.*

In short, things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do t ing and make what he p the gospel, the sacram faith. Meanwhile they let thing drop – namely, tha our salvation, righteousn redemption – as if they since outgrown it. This never remain intact whe begin to imagine they are know it all.

Paul judges *this sham dom* most severely. *these connoisseur saints fools. He says outright know nothing of Christ, Spirit and gifts of God give Christ... among which lo best.* The Corinthians m *not to exalt themselves bu one another in unity of sp there is one God, one L Spirit, and everything is c ever great the diversity.*

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Despite its polemical and apologetical passages, Luther understands the Second Letter to the Corinthians, in the light of its opening, as a letter of consolation. *In the first epistle, St Paul rebuked the Corinthians severely for many things, pouring sharp wine into their wounds and frightening them. But an apostle should be a preacher of comfort, to raise up terrified and fearful consciences... Therefore in this epistle h them once more and pou their wounds... He show wonderfully kind to them them to receive the sin with love.*

Of central significance f are chapters 3–5. H praises the office of preac gospel, *which is the hig most comforting of all wo*

for the profit and benefit of people's consciences. He shows how it is nobler than the office of the law, also how it is persecuted, and yet increases among believers and procures through the cross a hope of eternal glory. But with all this he touches the false apostles, who were inculcating the law over against the gospel, teaching mere outward holiness – that is, hypocrisy – and allowing the inner shame of unbelief to continue. So Luther notes briefly: *In chapters 10, 11, and 12 he* (Paul) *deals with the false apostles.*

Another reason for writing is the preparation of a collection of money in aid of the church in Jerusalem. Paul asks the Corinthians *to contribute also material aid and help in time of scarcity to the saints in Jerusalem* (chapters 8 and 9).

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

Galatians is much shorter than Romans, but it too contains the theological kernel of Pauline and Reformation theology. It too is one of the writings which played an essential role in Luther's reforming insight; in 1516/17, and again in 1531, he lectured on it. Here too Paul has to combat false teaching.

The Galatians had been brought by St Paul to the true Christian faith, from the law to the gospel. After his departure, however, false apostles came along. They were disciples of the true apostles, but they so turned the Galatians around that they believed they had to be saved by works of the law and were committing sin if they did not keep the law – as even several dignitaries in Jerusalem maintained, Acts 15.1. To refute them, St Paul magnifies his office; he will not take a back seat to any other apostle. He boasts that his doctrine and office are from God alone, in order that he might silence the boast of the false apostles who helped themselves to the works and reputation of the true apostles. He says it is not true, even if an angel were to preach differently, or he himself, to say nothing of disciples of apostles, or of apostles themselves. This he does in chapters 1 and 2, and concludes that everyone must be justified without merit, without works, without law, through Christ alone.

When this happens, the old human being becomes a "new creature" (6.15): "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (2.20). Doing the *works of love* is then only the outward side of this inner change, the name of which is faith.

PAUL'S SHORTER LETTERS

For Paul's other letters, to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, and to his fellow-workers Timothy and Titus, Luther in his Prefaces ga brief information about th tents. His Preface to Ph however, is interesting.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's letter to Philemon is addressed to the owner of a runaway slave called Onesimus, pleading in his favour. In his flight, Onesimus came into contact with some of Paul's associates, and made contact with Paul himself, though he was then in prison. Through his meeting with Paul, Onesimus became a Christian. Paul sends him back to his owner, asking Philemon not to punish him, but to welcome him as a brother, and then make him available to Paul as a helper in his work.

In his Preface Luther shows extraordinary sympathy for this little letter. *This epistle gives us a masterful and tender illustration of Christian love. For here we see how St Paul takes the part of poor Onesimus and, to the best of his ability, advocates his cause with his master. He acts exactly as if he were himself Onesimus, who had done wrong.*

Yet he does this not with compulsion, as lay w rights; but he empties hims rights in order to compel P also to waive his rights. Wh has done for us with Goc ther, that St Paul does also simus with Philemon. Fc emptied himself of his rig overcame the Father with humility, so that the Fathe put away his wrath and rig receive us into favour for th Christ, who so earnestly ac our cause and so heartily t part. For we are all his One if we believe.

The Kemberg Altar, by Lucas Cranach the You shows the stages in the of Jesus. The Reformati also changed church ar Christ's suffering and d the centre of Reformati theology, now stand in centre of the picture.

I·N·R·I

THE LETTERS OF PETER

Luther attached great theological significance to the letters of Peter. In the section **Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament** (on which see p. 47 above), he says that they, together with the letters of Paul, *far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.* The First Letter of Peter was particularly important for him. It is one of *the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine.*

This epistle *St Peter wrote to the converted heathen; he exhorts them to be steadfast in faith and to increase through all kinds of suffering and good works.* Therefore, especially in the first chapter, *he strengthens their faith through the divine promise and power of the salvation to come. He shows that this salvation has not been merited by us but was first proclaimed by the prophets. Therefore they ought now to live new and holy lives, and forget the old life, as those who have been born anew through the living and eternal Word of God.* Then the second chapter is about Christ *as the Head and the Cornerstone.* The last two chapters are particularly important for the practice of the local congregation, for in them Peter *instructs the spiritual rulers to inculcate the words and works of God alone, and serve the other with his gi not to be surprised but to re we have to suffer for the r Christ.*

The Second Letter of Pete ten against those wh that Christian faith can be works. Therefore he exhor to test themselves by goo and become sure of their fa as one knows trees by the The first chapter is concern praising the gospel over human doctrine. In the chapter Peter warns *agai false teachers who are to They are preoccupied wit and thereby deny Christ.* T the false teachers are de almost compels Luther t that he* (Peter) *means the of today. For these have wed the whole world greed and are wickedly lea irresponsible, fleshly, worl* The third chapter is conce show *that the Last Day w soon.* Peter here predicts that same time people will full of mockery, and will n fast to faith.

In relation to his own time can summarize as chapter 1 shows what C dom was to be like at t of the pure gospel. Ch shows how it was to be

ne of the pope and human octrine. Chapter 3 shows how, er this, people will despise both the gospel and all doctrine – and this is now in full swing – until Christ comes.

THE LETTERS OF JOHN

ust as he prized John most highly among the Gospels, as the *one, e, true, and chief gospel* (see p. above), so Luther also rated remely highly the letters of John, pecially the first. *This first epistle John is a genuine apostolic istle and ought to follow right er his gospel. For as in the gospel promulgates faith, so here he poses those who boast of faith thout works. He teaches in any different ways that works e not absent where faith is; and they are absent, then faith is t genuine but is lies and dark-ss. He does this, however, not by rping on the law, as the epistle James does, but by stimulat-g us to love even as God has ed us.*

hn's First Letter also refutes false eaching, according to which rist belonged to the world of spi- only appeared to be a human ng, and thus did not really die on cross His task, according to this ching, was not real living and ng, but teaching people the leeming knowledge of their deep- nature, which was one with d and could therefore be reuni- with him, thus being set free from all earthly ties. Luther found this false teaching returning in his own times. *For although people do not now publicly deny with their lips that Christ has come in the flesh, they do deny it with their hearts, by their teaching and life. For he who would be righteous and saved by his own works and deeds is as much as denying Christ, since Christ has come in the flesh for the very purpose of making us righteous and saving us without our works, by his blood alone.*

Thus the epistle fights against both parties: against those who would live in faith without any works, and against those who would become righteous by their works. It keeps us in the true middle way, that we become righteous and free from sin through faith; and then, when we are righteous, that we practise good works and love for God's sake, freely and without seeking anything else, that is, for ourselves.

The Second and Third Letters of John *are not doctrinal epistles but examples of love and faith. They too have a true apostolic spirit.*

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Up to this point, writes Luther in his Preface to Hebrews, *we have had to do with the true and certain chief books of the New Testament. The four which follow have from ancient times had a different reputation.* He is referring to Hebrews, and also to the Letters of James and Jude, and Revelation. The first two of these Luther removed from their traditional place between Philemon and 1 Peter, and put them with the two others as a kind of appendix to the New Testament. In the Table of Contents of his New Testament he numbered the books down to 3 John, but he left these four without a number, and also separated them from the other writings by indentation.

The reason why Luther devalues the Letter to the Hebrews is that he, like modern biblical scholars, rejects its traditional attribution to Paul. *It says in chapter 2 (verse 3), that through those who had themselves heard it from the Lord this doctrine has come to us and remained among us. It is thereby made clear that he is speaking about the apostles, as a disciple to whom this doctrine has come from the apostles, perhaps long after them. For St Paul, in Galatians 1.1, testifies powerfully that he has his gospel from no human being, nor through any human being, but from God himself.*

There is also a '*hard knot*' in t content, something unique the New Testament: in 6.4-8 t letter rejects the possibility that Christian who has come to fait and then has fallen away, has second possibility of repentanc since his behaviour has call Christ's reconciling death in contempt. This *hard knot* is to explained from the historical sit ation of the letter. It is address to a church in danger of beco ing weary in faith. This may connected with delay in Jesu return, which also according to t Second Letter of Peter troubl the churches. But such a *gloss* (explanation) of this hard wo can do nothing to change Luthe assessment.

Otherwise he esteems the lett as *a marvellously fine epist It discusses Christ's priestho masterfully and profoundly on t basis of the Scriptures, and disc ses a firm grasp of the reading the Scriptures and of the prop way of dealing with them.* In fa the meaning of the cross for salv tion is the central theme of the L ter to the Hebrews, which inte prets it in relation to the Old Tes ment office of the high priest. As t true high priest, Jesus sacrificed hi self by his death on the cross, a was raised to God's side; he we ahead of the Christian communi into the heavenly home, and no

ries on his priestly service in the venly sanctuary; he intercedes the church with God. The rch is set free from its sin by us' death, and made ready "to ve the living God" (9.14). The way to God has been opened for it by Jesus. Like Israel in the wilderness, so now the church on earth is the wandering people of God; and Christ, who has gone before it to God, will also bring it to its goal.

THE LETTER OF JAMES

s is well known, Luther did not esteem the Letter of James cially highly. In the section **ich are the true and noblest ks of the New Testament** (see ve, p. 47), he calls it *really an stle of straw*, which *has nothing he nature of the gospel about This James does nothing more n drive to the law and to its rks. Besides, he throws things ether so chaotically that it seems me he must have been some d, pious man, who took a few ings from the disciples of the stles and thus tossed them off paper. Or it may perhaps have n written by someone on the is of his preaching.*

he Letter of James opposes a fundamental misunderstanding ne teaching of the Apostle Paul. s message, that God accepts peoby free grace, not on the grounds that they fulfil the law, had from the beginning led to the wrong conclusion that it did not matter what people did; and already Paul himself had decisively refuted this view in his letters to the Romans (3.8; 6.12-14) and the Galatians (5.13). The Letter of James stresses this once more. He reminds Christians whose faith has become empty and formal that "the word of truth", by which Christians were born (1.18) is a power which drives them to concrete action. Thus Christians can and may be not only "hearers of the word", but must also become "doers of the word" (1.22). Luther completely accepts the objective kernel of this argumentation, yet he *cannot include him* in his Bible *among the chief books.* Yet no one should be prevented *from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him.*

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

uther did not rate Revelation particularly highly. *My spirit not accommodate itself to this book*, he writes in his Preface of 1522. Luther's main objection to it is that *Christ is neither taught nor*

known in it. This sounds astonishing, since Christ, "the lamb who was slain", plays a central role in Revelation! But Luther is clearly offended by the fact that in this book, Christ is represented as a rescuer from catastrophes, and at the end as the judge of human beings according to their works, without the slightest reference to faith and grace.

Luther also advances the formal argument from authorship, stating that he cannot consider the book *neither apostolic nor prophetic.* He objects that the apostles do not write in such a visionary way, in coded images, *but prophesy in clear and plain words. For it befits the apostolic office to speak clearly of Christ and his deeds, without images and visions.* The same is true of the prophets: *there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images.*

That does not prevent Luther, at the height of his controversy with the Roman church, from presenting in the Preface of 1530 a contemporary exposition of Revelation. For example, he interprets the two beasts of chapter 13 as *the papal empire and the imperial papacy.* On the seven angels with the seven trumpets in chapters 15 and 16, he writes: *The gospel thereupon increases and attacks the papacy on all sides by means of many learned and devout preachers; and the throne of the beast – the papal power – becomes dark and wretched and despised.* Luther applies the last rebellion of the hostile powers Gog and Magog (chapter 20) to the Turks, after whom *the Last Judgment follows quickly.*

On the basis of this exposition *we can profit by this book and make good use of it. First, for our comfort! We can rest assured that*

In the 1545 edition of the Luther Bible, an illustration of the Book of Revelation shows the Antichrist as a dragon wearing the threefold papal tiara. Luther played an active role in the creation of the woodcuts, which come from Cranach's workshop.

neither force nor lies, neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering shall suppress

ristendom, but it will gain the tory and conquer at last. Second, our warning against the great, rilous, and manifold offence that licts itself upon Christendom. So ther can finally give the following vice: *Let there be offences, divisis, heresies, and faults; let them what they can! If only the word of the gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we shall not doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst. As we see here in this book, that through and beyond all plagues, beasts, and evil angels Christ is nonetheless with his saints, and wins the final victory.*

THE PSALMS

Work on the Psalms played a special role in Luther's discoy of the Reformation faith, since was by struggling to understand lm texts like "deliver me in thy nteousness" (31.2) that Luther ally came to his decisive insight o the biblical meaning of the conot of the righteousness of God. ther therefore, throughout his , esteemed the Psalms particuy highly. This is shown in the faces or postscripts which he ded to the various editions of his nslation of the Psalms. Contrast- them with the devotional books egends of the saints, popular in Middle Ages, he writes: *no finer ok of examples or legends of the nts has ever come... to earth n the Psalter.*

What distinguishes this book from all others is first its rela- to Christ. Like the first Chris-s, Luther finds the way to Christ scribed in many Psalms. *The Psal- ought to be a precious and loved book, if for no other reason n this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly, and pictures his kingdom.* Secondly, the Psalms draw a picture of the *place and nature* of the whole Christian people or *saints*, as Luther calls believers, *the attitude they take toward God, toward friends and enemies, and the way they conduct themselves amid all dangers and sufferings.* Above all, the Psalter contains *their words, how they spoke with God and prayed, and still speak and pray.*

These words, *which they used when they talked with God himself in great earnestness and on the most important matters,* enable us to *look down to the foundation and source of their words and deeds. We can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need.* This is worth more than all the legends about the saints, since it makes it possible for the reader in later times to find his own situation in the Psalms, as if the

words of the Psalms *were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better.* This means that the Christian can unhesitatingly trust the spiritual guidance of the Psalms, *for it teaches you in joy, fear, hope, and sorrow to think and speak as all the saints have thought and spoken.*

Praise and lamentation are the two basic melodies which the Psalter plays, inviting us to join in. *Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens, yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God, because of his blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath God! So, too, when they speak fear and hope, they use such wo that no painter could so depict you fear or hope, and no Cicero other orator so portray them.*

All that also makes the Psa *a fine, bright, pure mi* which gives a true picture of w *the holy Christian church* *Indeed you will find in it yourself and the true* gnothi seau *(know yourself) as well as God self and all creatures.* Luther even describe the Psalter as a *Bible.* It seems to him as if *the Spirit wanted to take the troub himself to compile a short a and book of examples of Christendom or all saints, so anyone who could not read whole Bible would here anyway almost an entire summ of it, comprised in one little b*

It remains for Christians to th God *for such unspeakable ings*, and to *receive them and them diligently and carefully, cising ourselves in them to praise and honour of God.*

FACE TO FACE WITH THE PEOPLE MARTIN LUTHER AS A BIBLE TRANSLATOR

LUTHER'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

uther's translation of the Bible was praised as his "greatest to the Germans", and rightly For centuries it has not only a deep mark German Prote- tism and its ituality, but has had a lasting uence on Ger- n language and rature. True, it n exaggeration t Luther by his le created the dern High Ger- n literary lan- ge; but he cer- ly made a deci- contribution its consolida- and general

> *We do not have to inquire of the literal Latin how we are to speak German. Rather we must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children in the street, the common man in the market place. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. That way they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.*
> *(On Translation: An Open Letter)*

Luther did not 'invent' the language of his Bible, but with sure judgment chose the official language of the Electoral chancery in Meissen. This east central German written dialect, marked among other things by influences from German mysticism, and therefore full of images, graphic, and close to the people, was familiar beyond the frontiers of Saxony and Thuringia through the work of printers in Leipzig and Wittenberg, and could

The Luther Memorial in Worms recalls Luther's appearance before the Diet, where he appealed to the Bible as the only true measure of his work.

also be understood in upper Germany. But it was thanks to the unique power of the Reformer's language, and the triumph of his Bible, that this dialect really became the basis of the German high and literary language. The wording of his Bible was to a large extent taken over without change by competing Catholic editions – only the basic Reformation statements that Luther had discovered and worked out in his translation were corrected in the direction of Catholic doctrine.

Beyond this general linguistic effect, the Luther Bible has left many traces in vocabulary and usage, in well-known biblica tions, down to particular sions and echoes of whi are now scarcely conscio reflects the fact that for ce in Protestant areas of Ge Luther's Bible was a book home and the people. Germ try, too, is full of quotations a sions. As is well known, the Goethe, and in our century Brecht, learned their langua Martin Luther's Bible.

This tradition remained ali towards the end of the 1 tury; Luther's language was ral understandable, and not educated people. Since th more rapid development of guage, and an incisive bre tradition, have caused the Bible to become for many sealed with seven seals". Ne translations have been publi an attempt to bridge the g bring the message of the

eople of the present day. To some tent, the gain in understanding is nsiderable; but the distancing om the power of Luther's lan- age is at the same time made all e more painfully apparent.

So that Martin Luther's Bible should not become an exhibit in linguistic museum, the Protestant hurch has attempted several times nce the end of the 19th century adapt his translation respectfully changed usage. This process of vision of the Luther Bible came to end in 1984.

Changed meaning of individual words (Joshua 1.9)

uther 1545:

iehe, ich hab dir geboten, laß du getrost und freidig seiest.

uther 1984:

iehe, ich habe dir geboten, laß du getrost und unverzagt eist.

oon after Luther's death, the rinters arbitrarily changed the ord *freidig* (bold, daring), which as no longer understood, into e misleading *freudig* (joyful)!

Minor adjustment in form (Matthew 2.14-15a)

Luther 1545:

Und er stund auf und nahm das Kindlein und seine Mutter zu sich bei der Nacht und entweich in Ägyptenland und bleib allda bis nach dem Tod Herodis.

Luther 1984:

Da stand er auf und nahm das Kindlein und seine Mutter mit sich bei Nacht und entwich nach Ägypten und blieb dort bis nach dem Tod des Herodes.

An extreme example (Luke 1.1)

Luther 1545:

Sintemal sichs viel unterwunden haben, zu stellen die Rede von den Geschichten, so unter uns ergangen sind...

Luther 1984:

Viele haben es schon unternommen, Bericht zu geben von den Geschichten, die unter uns geschehen sind...

Sintemal means 'since', but the revision made the subordinate clause into a main clause, because it forms part of a long and complicated sentence.

THE BEGINNINGS OF LUTHER'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

"KNIGHT GEORGE'S" RECORD: THE NEW TESTAMENT IN ELEVEN WEEKS

Luther did not plan long in advance his translation of the Bible into German, and he did not drive himself to make it; he rather shrank from this enormous task. In addition to his lecturing duties at the university, he had more than enough to do with the defence and establishment of his Reformation in disputations, sermons, and short and longer occasional writings. It was his compulsory protective custody in the Wartburg after the Diet of Worms in 1521 which presented him with an unexpected amount of free time. Yet for a long time he did not see this as an opportunity, but busied himself with work which seemed more urgent.

Martin Luther as "Knig George" (painting by L Cranach the Elder).

Luther had indeed spoken earlier of a translation of the Bible into German, but the stimulus to start work on it now came from outside. As, after seven months, he was paying his secret three-day visit to Wittenberg, Melanchthon pressed him to do it; as Luther later told the story in his *Table Talk*: *Philip Melanchthon forced me to translate the New Testament.* Above all, he should bring the letters of Paul, which had been obscured by *glosses and some kind of (theological) twaddle, into the clear light of day.*

Immediately after his retu Wartburg, Luther set t and completed the translati New Testament in the unb short time of eleven weeks ing he worked seven days that means three chapte and Luther was also writi same time two occasional and other things as well! A September 1522, the tra appeared in print in Witten called the 'September Te from the date of its publica ween 3000 and 5000 cop

printed, an unusually large printing in those days, yet the book was very soon sold out, so a second edition came on the market in December. In the same year a pirated edition appeared in Basel, followed in the following year by twelve more. In the thirteen years to the appearance of the full Bible in 1534, there were 87 printings! Considering the price of books at that time, that represents a huge success.

LUTHER'S LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN GERMAN AND GREEK

Luther was not the first to translate the Bible into German. Between 1466 and 1522, we know of sixteen upper German and two lower German printings of the Bible. But the translation, by an unknown writer, was clumsy, and in part already old-fashioned in its language. Attempts to correct this were made in later printings, but without success. In contrast, Luther's version had the effect of a revelation. A nineteenth-century scholar, the Catholic Reformation theologian Ignaz Döllinger, has expressed the relation between Luther and his predecessors in the formula: "They stammered, but he spoke." (The translation of Psalm 23 on page 74–75 is a good example.)

But Luther not only had a unique competence in the use of German: he surpassed his predecessors also by translating the New Testament, not from Jerome's Latin translation, the Vulgate, but from the original Greek. Here Luther was helped by the fact that the humanist Erasmus had recently printed the

The Luther Room in the Wartburg, where Luther translated the New Testament.

Greek text of the New Testament for the first time, albeit from two late manuscripts.

Another piece of good fortune was the appointment in 1518 of the excellent Greek scholar Melanchthon to a chair in Witt Under his guidance, Luther nificantly deepened his knc of Greek, and on his retu the Wartburg he critically e his entire manuscript with chthon before it was printe

TWELVE YEARS' WORK ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

Luther was not able to repeat, in his work on the Old Testament, his record-breaking performance in translating the New. He needed more years for the Old Testament than weeks for the New! To begin with, he made good progress: the Pentateuch appeared in print as early as 1523, and in the following year the historical and poetical books (Joshua to the Song of Songs). In this part of the work Luther also received advice from Melanchthon, and especially from the Wittenberg professor of Hebrew, Matthew Aurogallus. But already in the Book of Job, the first of the poetical books, Luther had to struggle with the enormous difficulties of the Hebrew language, which also arose in translating the prophets: *In Job we made such a hard job of it that Master Philip (Melanchthon), Aurogallus and I sometimes scarcely did three lines in four days.*

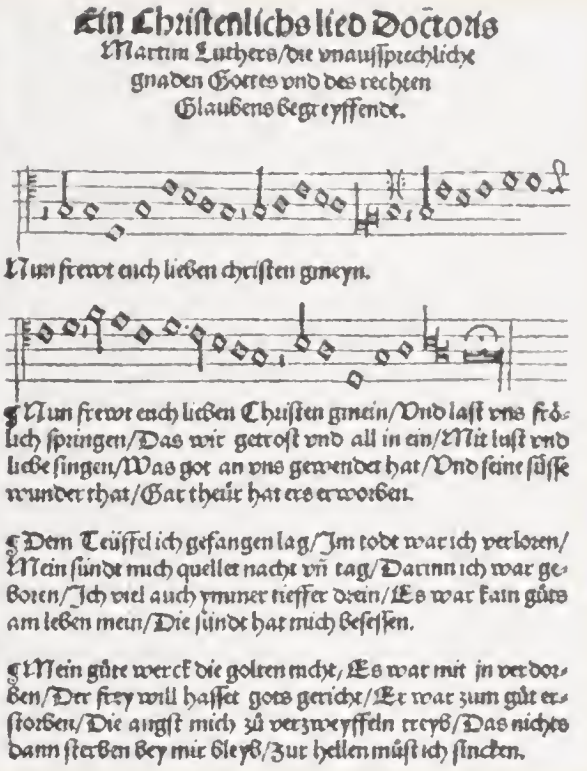
From 1524, Luther's translation work was also held back by travel and illness, also by theological controversies, the Peasants' War, the quarrel with the Swiss about the Lord's Supper, and other h ces. In the following years published individual prophe was only in 1534 that his fi plete German Bible appeare

'On Translation: An Of Letter', in which Luthe recorded his experienc translating the Bible. This 'Letter' is the first theoretical treatise on t principles of translatior

Edich Cristlich lider
Lobgesang/vñ Psalm/dem rai-
nen wort Gottes gemeß/auf der
heylige schrifft/durch mancher-
ley hochgelerter gemacht/in der
Kirchen zů singen/ wie es dann
vmm tayl berayt zů Wittenberg
in übung ist.

wittenberg.

M. D. Xxiij.



Ein Christenlichs lied Doctoris
Martini Luthers/die vnaussprechliche
gnaden Gottes vnd des rechten
Glaubens begreyffende.

Nun freuet euch lieben christen gmeyn.

¶ Nun freut euch lieben Christen gmain/Vnd last vns frö-
lich springen/Das wir getrost vnd all in ein/Mit lust vnd
liebe singen/Was got an vns gewendet hat/Vnd seine süsse
wunder that/Gar theür hat es erworben.

¶ Dem Teüffel ich gefangen lag/Im tode war ich verloren/
Mein sünde mich quelet nacht vñ tag/Darinn ich war ge-
boren/Ich viel auch ymmer tieffer drein/Es war kain güts
am leben mein/Die sünde hat mich besessen.

¶ Mein güte werck die golten nicht/Es war mit jn verdor-
ben/Der frey will hasset gots gericht/Er war zum gůt er-
storben/Die angst mich zů verzweyffeln treyb/Das nichts
dann sterben bey mir bleyb/Zur hellen můst ich sincken.

Luther's first hymn, 'Nun freut euch, liebe Christen, gmein' ('Now rejoice, dear Christians, together') was published in the 'Little Book of Spiritual Songs' (1524).

extant, not in Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, but only in Greek and Latin. In order to complete more quickly the work on these less important writings, Luther had Melanchthon translate the Books of Maccabees, and Justus Jonas Judith, Tobit and Baruch.

It included also the so-called 'Apocrypha', which Luther had separated from the Old Testament and printed as a separate section of the Bible, since these writings are

Before the full Bible was printed, he 'revised' the New Testament again with Melanchthon, and thoroughly checked the Psalms with three Hebraists.

LUTHER'S TRANSLATION METHOD

WHAT DOES "FACE TO FACE WITH THE PEOPLE" MEAN?

The breakthrough achieved by Luther's Bible was due to the fact that, as Bible translator, he stretched the resources of the German language as no one before him had done. In the process he adopted some popular or proverbial expressions; but he did not speak "face to face *like* the people". That, in any case, was not what his often quoted statement from his On Translation:

An Open Letter (1530) meant! Luther consciously excluded swear-words and street slang from his Bible, even though he was happy to use them in his controversial writings (for example, in the same Letter, he calls his opponents only *asses* and *assheads*; see below).

Examples can be quoted to confirm this. Where Saul goes into the cave to respond to the call of nature (1 Samuel 24.4), Luther first wrote in his manuscript: *And Saul went in to shit.* But in print, this became: *to cover his feet*, with the marginal note: *Holy Scripture is chaste.* And where Saul is tormented by an evil spirit (1 Samuel 16.14), Luther resisted the temptation to use an obvious familiar expression meaning: "He was ridden by the Devil", though this would have sounded good in German.

When Luther wanted to speak *face to face with the people*, he meant something different. This is shown by the examples discussed in On Translation: An Open Letter and in the Summaries of the Psalms and reasons for the translation (1533). In all these cases he was not concerned to find popular expressions, but to do justice to the form and spirit of the German language. Instead of slavish imitations of foreign linguistic forms, Luther wanted to find the natural way of saying things in German. That is what he meant by being *face with the people*, and what he supremely achieved

Luther did not always f conclusive translation at attempt. He worked to the his life on detailed correctio translation, the aim of whi *to speak pure and clear G*

"TO SPEAK PURE AND CLEAR GERMA

His first rule in translati that the translator sho stick close to the wording of but must reproduce its m

A caricature of the Roma Church: the pope, surro ded by cardinals and bis has a huge treasure che as his throne.

Luther's opponents caricatured him as a seven-headed monster: doctor, monk, temporal lord, church father, fanatic, adviser of the evangelical churches, and agitator.

Anyone who wants to talk German must not use the Hebrew way of speaking, but, if he understands the Hebrew man, he must grasp his meaning, and ask himself: 'What does a German man say in such a case?' So when he has the German words for it, he should let the Hebrew words go, and express the meaning in the best German he can. (Summaries of the Psalms and reasons for translating).

"NOT TO ABANDON THE WORD"

For Luther the rule "Meaning before word" ceases to apply where he found the original biblical wording irreplaceable. *On the other*

rst example: Psalm 90.12

524 manuscript:

aß wir unser Tage zählen,
o tu uns kund;
o wollen wir kommen
it weisem Herzen.

rst printed edition, 1524:

aß uns wissen
ie Zahl unser Tage,
aß wir eingehen
it weisem Herzen.

Revised edition from 1531:

Lehre uns bedenken,
daß wir sterben müssen,
auf daß wir klug werden.

Here we can see how Luther was struggling not only to find the right German wording, but at the same time to grasp the meaning of the text. Often for him the two go hand in hand.

Second example: Psalm 63.6

First printed edition, 1524:

Laß meine Seele voll werden
wie mit Schmalz und Fettem,
daß mein Mund
mit fröhlichen Lippen rühme.

Revised edition from 1531:

Das wäre meines Herzens
Freude und Wonne,
wenn ich dich
mit fröhlichem Munde
loben sollte.

Luther himself, in his 'Summ
ries of the Psalms', gives the
reason for the change:
Since no German can unde
stand (the first version), we
relinquished the Hebrew w
('with lard and fat', by whic
the Hebrews mean joy, just
a healthy and fat animal is h
and, conversely, a sad anim
loses weight and grows thir
and a thin animal is sad) an
rendered the passage in cle
German.

Fourth example: Psalm 23.1-3

This example illustrates not only Luther's search for the best German wording, but also the distance between the wording before Luther and the various stages of Luther's translation, until it reaches the classical simple, perfect form which is familiar to most Protestant Christians.

Note particularly the un-German literal expressions of the pre-Luther translation, from which Luther freed himself step by step:

an der Statt der Weide –
in der Wohnung des Grases –
da viel Gras steht – auf einer
grünen Auen
ob dem Wasser der Wieder
bringung – am Wasser gute
Ruhe – zum Wasser, das m
erkühlet – zum frischen Wä

Er bekehrt' mein Seel –
Er kehret wieder meine See
Er erquicket meine Seele

auf die Steig der Gerechtigk
auf rechtem Pfad – auf recht
Straße

Pre-Luther German translati
1466 (Mentelin Bible, transl
from the Latin of the Vulgat

Der Herr, der richt' mich,
und mir gebrast (=mangelt)
und an der Statt der Weide
do satzt' er mich.
Er fuorte mich ob dem Was
der Wiederbringung,
er bekehrt' mein Seel.

Third example: Matthew 12.34

Since 1522:

Wes das Herz voll ist,
des geht der Mund über.
(What the heart is full of
overflows through the mouth)

Here Luther found the classical expression at the first attempt. He defends this 'free translation' against petty criticism in his 'On Translation: An Open Letter' as follows: *If I am to follow these asses, they will lay the original before me literally and translate thus: 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.' Tell me, is this speaking German? What German could understand something like that? What is 'the abundance of the heart'? No German can say that; unless, perhaps, he was trying to say that someone was altoghether too magnanimous or too courageous, though even that would not yet be correct. For 'abundance of the heart' is not German, any more than abundance of the house, abundance of the stove, or abundance of the bench is German...*

Er fuort' mich aus auf die
Steig der Gerechtigkeit
umb seinen Namen.

Luther's manuscript:

Der Herr ist mein Hirte,
mir wird nichts mangeln.
Er läßt mich weiden
in der Wohnung des Grases
und nähret mich
am Wasser guter Ruhe.
Er kehret wieder meine Seele,
er führet mich auf rechtem Pfad
umb seins Namens willen.

First printed edition of the Psalms, 1524:

Der Herr ist mein Hirte,
mir wird nichts mangeln.
Er läßt mich weiden,
da viel Gras steht,
und führet mich zum Wasser,
das mich erkühlet.
Er erquicket meine Seele,
er führet mich
auf rechter Straße
umb seins Namens willen.

Revision of the Psalms, 1531:

Der Herr ist mein Hirte,
mir wird nichts mangeln.
Er weidet mich
auf einer grünen Auen
und führet mich
zum frischen Wasser.
Er erquicket meine Seele,
er führet mich auf
rechter Straße
umb seines Namens willen.

hand I have not just gone ahead anyway and disregarded altogether the exact wording of the original. Rather with my helpers I have been very careful to see that where everything turns on a single passage, I have kept to the original quite literally and have not lightly departed from it. Ah, translating is not everyone's skill. It requires a right, devout, honest, sincere, Godfearing, Christian, trained, informed, and experienced heart (On Translation: An Open Letter).

For example, Luther does not think of making difficult biblical concepts like *flesh* or *righteous/justify* by paraphrase, as in some modern translations. He always starts with the question whether *there is something lying in the words* (Summaries of the Psalms). He does not follow h inflexible rule; the choice be "literal" and "meaningful" him a question of judgment decided from case to case: *W sometimes kept strictly words, and in other place given the meaning.*

> *I have constantly tried, in translating, to produce a pure and clear German, and it has often happened that for two or three or four weeks we have searched and inquired for a single word and sometimes not found it even then... Now that it is translated and finished, everybody can read and master it. The eyes now run over three or four pages and do not stumble once – without realizing what boulders and clods had once lain there where now he goes along as over a smoothly-planed board.*
>
> *(On Translation: An Open Letter).*

The "Luther rose", Martin Luther's coat of a He himself explained it a follows: the black cross the red heart stands for in the Crucified, who "sa us" and "keeps us in life The white rose (white is the colour of the Spirit ar the angels) shows "that gives joy, comfort and pe The blue field points to future "heavenly joy", an the golden ring symbolis the everlasting nature of heavenly blessedness.

Luther himself gave the fol example, among others, keeping to the words:

For example: Psalm 68.18

Since 1522:

Du bist in die Höhe gefahren
und hast das Gefängnis
gefangen.
(Thou hast ascended on high,
thou hast led captivity captive.)

Here it would have been good German to say, 'Thou hast set the captives free.' But this is too weak, and does not convey the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew, which says literally, 'Thou hast led captivity captive.' This does not imply merely that Christ freed the captives, but also that he captured and led away the captivity itself, so that it never again could or would take us captive again; thus it is really an eternal redemption... Death can no longer hold us, sin can no longer incriminate us, the law can no longer accuse our conscience... Therefore for the comforting of our conscience, we should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the Hebrew language where it does a better job than our German.

(Summaries of the Psalms)

THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES: "THE PURE GOSPEL"

It was an argument about a single word which led Luther to write On Translation: An Open Letter, in which he defended his translation of the Bible. It was the little word *alone* in Romans 3.28. In the 1530 edition, only slightly changed from 1522, it read: *So we hold now that man becomes righteous without the work of the law, through faith alone.*

For example: Romans 3.28

Since 1530
(only slightly changed from 1522):

So halten wir es nu,
daß der Mensch gerecht werde
ohn des Gesetzes Werk,
alleine durch den Glauben.

This verse of the Bible contained for Luther the heart of the gospel: the good news of pure grace, the justification of the sinner by faith alone, without any achievement of his own. In order to protect this good news from misunderstanding, as if faith might not be quite enough, Luther added the word *alone*, although it does not correspond to anything in the Greek text.

After his marriage, Luth with his family in Witter in the former Augustini monastery. The picture the "Large Lecture Roo the Wittenberg Luther H It was originally built as dormitory for the monk Luther and Melanchthc lectured here. The lectu desk is at the far end.

Today even Catholic biblical scholars confirm that Luther by this addition expressed exactly the intention of the Apostle Paul. Faith and works, trust in grace and building on one's own achievements: these are indeed for the author of Romans relationships which strictly exclude one another. But it is tempting (and the mediaeval church gave in to the temptation) to weaken the hard either/or and say: It needs faith *and* works! That is why it was so important to Luther to express the either/or so clearly that it could not be ignored.

He knew that he had not only the Apostle Paul but also the German language on his side. *It is a fact that these four letters s o l a are not there. And these blockheads stare at them like cows at a new gate. At the same time they see that it conveys the sens text; it belongs there if the tion is to be clear and vigor the nature of our German la that in speaking of two thir of which is affirmed and th denied, we use the wor (only) along with the wo (not) or* kein *(no). For exam*

"The farmer brings allein *grain* and kein *money"; "No, really I have now* nicht *money, but* allein *grain". There are innumerable cases of this kind in daily use.*

Faith alone without works makes one godly. I am only sorry that I did not also add the words alle *and then, and say, "without* any *works of any laws," so that it would have been expressed with perfect clarity* (On Translation: An Open Letter).

In another important place, Luther made Paul's message clearer. This is the place at the beginning of Romans (1.17), which he had struggled so hard to understand: "In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed". At first, this sounded in Luther's ears not like liberating good news, but like bitter mockery. Even in the gospel, he still encountered the mercilessly judging God! Then he learned that the Bible has its own way of speaking, and he recognized the liberating sense of the statement. And what he had learned, he now also wrote in his translation: *In the gospel is revealed the righteousness which counts before God.*

Luther also considered the translation "righteousness that God makes" or "works", which as we understand it today comes even nearer to the meaning of Paul's statement. God not only attributes to the sinner, in the *joyful exchange* (see p. 16 above) the righteousness of Christ; he creates in him through his spirit the righteousness which corresponds to his will – what Luther, moreover, had clearly expressed when in the Preface to Romans, he says that faith is a work of God in human beings, through which they are newly born of God.

REFORMATION "KEY WORDS"

A special feature of Martin Luther's translation is that he uses certain German words, in which his Reformation understanding was concentrated, as often as possible, even where they are not required by the original wording. Such words are *faith, grace, comfort* (through the gospel), and *preach* (= proclaim the gospel).

So Luther says already of Abraham: *He preached the name of the Lord* (Genesis 12.8), although he knew that most Hebrew scholars, instead of "preach" preferred the translation 'call upon (in prayer)'.

Of God himself, Luther says that he *keeps faith eternally* (Psalm 146.6), whereas a more literal translation would be 'faithfulness'. But God's faithfulness lies for Luther precisely in the fact that he stands faithfully and steadfastly to the promises that he has given to faith: *The one who believes will not be put to*

shame (Romans 10.11), that is, God will not leave him in the lurch.

A particularly good example is the beginning of the 73rd Psalm, which is literally: *Truly, God is good to/for Israel.* Anticipating the 'yet' of verse 23, Luther allows the full gospel to speak: *Yet God is Israel's comfort...*

In this way these words became key words, emphasised in Luther's German Bible. Someone has counted that Luther translates 21 Hebrew and 12 Greek words by "preach". The same is true, though the numbers are somewhat lower, of his favourite words *comfort* (both noun and verb), and *gr* with *faith* Luther (with t tion of God's faith(fulnes example just given shows needs to add anything, s biblical usage is quite neous.

Luther does not differ translator; he does r work out the nuances of texts; he rather accumu concentrates. The one tr the liberating good news, became aware of, should possible be heard in his B together with his unique language, is the secret o tiveness.

WORDS WHICH STICK IN THE MIND, AND PENETRATE THE HEART

If one looks behind the strategies of making the Bible understandable ("face to face with the people"), to grasp what is special and unique about the Luther Bible, one must mention, alongside the concentrated emphasis on the "main words" of the Reformation message of faith, a special aspect of Luther's Bible language from which we have become estranged, and which perhaps for that reason particularly strikes us.

Under the influence of Latin stylistics, the German language since the 17th century has become a rational instrument in which logical clarity is more important than sensuous immediacy. That is shown in the notorious compli German sentences. The nate clause, for examp directly follow the antec whatever cost. But the s dency shows itself in qui changes of word orde translates Luke 9.62: *Wer an den Pflug legt und* rück... (Whoever puts hi the plough and looks back ding to modern German one would use the compo 'zurücksieht' (literally: 'ba – but this replaces an in concept. When I hear 'zur I form an abstract concep vision', so that I unders image before I see it (if I

As a minature example of a complex sentence, let us take a central gospel statement, the beginning of the Great Commission by the risen Christ in Matthew 28.18. During revision of the Luther Bible, it was suggested for a time to give it a more modern form: "Mir ist alle Macht im Himmel und auf der Erde gegeben." (Literally: To me is all power in heaven and on earth given.)

This is correct German and conforms to the grammatical rule according to which, in a sentence with a compound predicate, here 'ist gegeben' (is given), the main verb (given) must be separated from the auxiliary (is) and put at the end of the sentence, sometimes following a long chain of other expressions. To take a random example: "Ich habe gestern um fünf Uhr meinen Freund N. mit seiner ganzen Familie am Bahnhof abgeholt." (Yesterday at five o'clock I have [...] my friend N. with his whole family from the station [collected].) Such a construction means that it is not until the last word that the message becomes fully understandable. (In the example given, the last word could also have been 'met' or 'said goodbye to'.) Until the last word is spoken, I must store in my short-term memory a whole series of partial data, while waiting for a final definition. I cannot make any use of these partial data. I cannot draw any conclusion from them, because the conclusion might be wrong. I cannot react emotionally to them, because the situation I might assume could be completely unreal. The whole process involves only my understanding, which is waiting for the final building block to be put into place and so complete the information.

Exactly the same is true of a sentence like: "Mir ist alle Macht im Himmel und auf der Erde gegeben" (literally: To me is [...] all power in heaven and on earth [given].) Until the last word *given* is spoken, the sentence as a whole has no definite meaning. When, on the contrary, Luther writes: *Mir ist gegeben alle Gewalt im Himmel und auf Erden* (To me is given all power in heaven and on earth), he makes a statement in which each building block is effortlessly placed on the one before, each subordinate statement is meaningful in itself, and it remains open for further additions. *Mir ist gegeben* (to me is given): the question 'to whom?' does not need to be asked, because it has just been stated that *Jesus spoke*, but the question 'what?' is answered by *all power*, and 'where?' by *in heaven and on earth*. It is like a string of pearls, in which each pearl keeps its own value.

Language built in this way is not for quick readers who want to know immediately what the text is about. They are words which need time to unfold, in immediate "sensuous" presence. They do not primarily address the understanding: they penetrate word by word into a deeper level, the "heart" or the "conscience". Luther's translation does not supply information: it turns the word into speech that works in the human heart, and becomes

The Reformation altar of the City Church in Wittenberg, by Lucas Cranach the Elder. It shows by its composition the evangelical view of Christian proclamation.

Cranach worked out the
the picture with his frien
In the main picture, the
tion of the Lord's Suppe
sides baptism and penite

which Luther saw as a third sacrament; on the predella, under the main picture, the preaching of the Word. Cranach included prominent contemporaries in the New Testament story.

The central picture, representing the Lord's Supper, is one of Cranach's best integrated works. Luther as 'Knight George' is receiving the cup from the cup-bearer, Lucas Cranach the Younger. This scene records the reintroduction of the cup in the Lord's Supper.

On the predella, Luther in his sermon is pointing to the crucified Christ. The congregation includes in the foreground Katharine Luther and their eldest son Hans.

The left picture shows the baptism of a child by Melanchthon, although he was never ordained as a priest or minister. Beside him stand Lucas Cranach the Elder and Prince John the Constant.

The right picture shows the Wittenberg city minister Johannes Bugenhagen hearing confession.

This allegorical woodcut entitled "Christ's Sheepfold", is based on the image of John 10.1-2. Martin Luther is represented as a speaker of Christian truth. He appears in the roof window of a hut which recalls the stall in Bethlehem. Through him the faithful are called to prayer, and Christ himself gains entry. People from all levels of society throng to him in the p hut, ignoring the magn church building nearb The pope has his thro the roof of the church. A cardinal, a bishop ar a monk try, like thieve robbers, to enter Chris sheepfold by way of th that is, they do not foll the way of faith, as Ch the gospel requires.

what in the theology of Paul and Luther is the very essence of the gospel, the changing and renewing good news of grace.

The vivid immediacy of Luther's Bible language is linked with another well-known characteristic of his translation: its wording is very easy to remember. A Luther sentence, even one difficult to understand, is easier to retain than a modern equivalent which can be immediately understood. mory, like the "heart", h with the unconscious; i specific, concrete imag orders its contents, not in tual hierarchies, but addit associatively. The easy "m lity" of the Luther Bible is an important factor in its ness. Thus Luther's Germ was fortunate in many wa richly rewards anyone w himself a little trouble to

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The man who smoked the Bib

The meeting of representatives of Methodist churches in Zimbabwe, southern Africa was drawing to an end. Among the guests was Gaylord F. Kambarami, general secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe. An evangelist making a speech suddenly broke off and pointed to Kambarami. "This man", he cried out, "probably can't remember me just now. But fifteen years ago, he wanted to sell me a New Testament." Tension mounted in the room. Why was the evangelist talking like this? "When I refused to buy it", he went on, "he gave it to me. I told him that I would use its pages to roll cigarettes. To my astonishment, he immediately agreed, but on one condition: that I should read each page before I smoked it. So I smoked Matthew, I smoked Mark, I smoked Luke. Of course, not without skimming quickly through the text. I began to smoke John too. But when I read John 3.16*, I couldn't go on. That verse changed my life. Today I stand before you as an evangelist."

**For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.*

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